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ABSTRACT

This report identifies and describes practices that support the achievement of students enrolled in five high performing, high poverty elementary schools. Findings indicate that despite variations, the school share many similarities in terms of the strategies they employ to strengthen academic performance: (1) the schools embrace the belief that all students can be academically successful; (2) administrators put the talents and experience of teachers to their best use; (3) faculty and staff regularly communicate across teaching areas and programs and are eager to learn from one another; (4) staff use student assessment data to identify areas where students can improve and where their own teaching strategies can be adjusted to meet students' needs; (5) a culture of student-centered learning predominates; (6) educators persist in addressing academic barriers to learning, collaborate with colleagues in identifying solutions to barriers, and participate in schoolwide intervention strategies; (7) faculty and staff view parents as critical partners; (8) while special education services are valued and supported, educators consider a referral for such services as a last resort; and (9) educators share a view of special education as a means to fully integrate students into the regular education program. Recommendations for change strategies are provided. (Contains 20 tables.) (CR)

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EXPECTING SUCCESS:

A Study of Five High Performing, High Poverty Schools

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A Study of Five High Performing, High Poverty Schools

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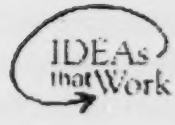

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This document is a part of a series of publications by CCSSO on serving students with disabilities in high performing, high poverty schools. Also see *Expecting Success: An Analysis of Education Policies in Texas* and *Expecting Success: Self-Assessment & Resource Guide for Improving Service Delivery.*

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This report was based on a study of five Texas elementary schools, and we thank those five schools and their principals who gave so generously of their time:

Baskin Elementary School
San Antonio Independent School District, San Antonio
Carmen Payne, Principal

Canterbury Elementary School
Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District, Edinburg
Nellie Cantu, Principal

Loma Terrace Elementary School
Ysleta Independent School District, El Paso
Dale Skinner, Principal

Lora B. Peck Elementary School
Houston Independent School District, Houston
LaWanna Goodwin, Principal

T. W. Ogg Elementary School
Brazosport Independent School District, Clute
Terry Moore, Principal

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Executive Summary

This report identifies and describes practices that support the achievement of students enrolled in high performing, high poverty elementary schools. The five schools selected for the study have attained high levels of achievement in the Texas accountability system, which rates elementary schools according to their attendance rates and their students' performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Significantly, the schools profiled in this report met the state's high standards while exempting a low percentage of students with disabilities from taking the TAAS.

These schools prove that it is possible to meet and even surpass high standards while including students with disabilities in state assessments and in the state accountability system. Moreover, they demonstrate forcefully that students with disabilities can be held to challenging academic standards.

Researchers used the following criteria in selecting schools for this study:

- The school's 1998 rating in the Texas accountability system
- The proportion of economically disadvantaged students attending the school
- The percentage of students with disabilities exempted from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
- The school's general admission criteria
- The diverse demographic characteristics and geographic locations of the schools

The schools selected were

- Baskin Elementary School, San Antonio;
- Canterbury Elementary School, Edinburg;
- Loma Terrace Elementary School, El Paso;
- T. W. Ogg Elementary School, Clute; and
- Lora B. Peck Elementary School, Houston.

The five study schools vary in terms of their location, size, student demographics, and special education populations. Three of the schools are located in large urban areas and two, in smaller, more rural communities. Enrollment varies from 305 students at the smallest school to 985 at the largest. At four of the schools the majority of students are Latino, and at one of the schools the majority of students are African American. Income levels of the families served varies significantly. At three of the schools, over 85 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, while only slightly more than half of students qualify at the other two schools. At the time of selection for the study, three of the schools included a relatively low number of students receiving special education services, while the number of students who received special education services at the other two schools only slightly exceeded the state average.

Despite these variations, the study schools share many similarities in terms of the strategies they employ to strengthen academic performance:

- Each of the schools embraces the belief that all students can be academically successful. They set measurable and high goals for all students and focus on intensive, early intervention efforts to bring students up to grade level.
- Administrators at these schools put the talents and experience of teachers to their best use. They encourage the teacher creativity and leadership, align resources with instructional priorities, and collaborate with teachers and support staff in formulating instructional strategies.
- Faculty and staff at these schools regularly communicate across teaching areas and programs and are eager to learn from one another.
- Staff at each school use student assessment data to identify areas where students can improve and where their own teaching strategies can be adjusted to meet students' needs.
- A culture of student-centered learning predominated at each of these schools. Attention was paid to areas where students were experiencing difficulty and students were provided opportunities to excel in areas of special interest.
- Educators at these schools persist in addressing academic barriers to learning, collaborate with colleagues in identifying solutions to barriers, and participate in schoolwide intervention strategies such as tutoring and mentoring programs.
- Faculty and staff at the five schools view parents as critical partners in the educational process. At each of the schools, parental participation is solicited and facilitated by faculty and staff.
- While special education services are valued and supported at the schools, educators consider a referral for such services a last resort. Staff employ multiple intervention strategies before they determine that a referral for special education services is appropriate. Moreover, the schools provide formal opportunities for instructional staff to brainstorm additional interventions before referral for special education testing.
- Educators at these schools share a view of special education as a means to fully integrate students into the regular education program. Students are provided every means of support and assistance they need, but educators view placement in special education as a temporary rather than permanent placement.

Expecting Success

A Study of Five High Performing, High Poverty Elementary Schools

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 reaffirmed that students with disabilities are to be taught the same curriculum, and held to the same standards, as all other students. In addition, the act requires that students with disabilities be included in state and district assessments, with appropriate individual modifications and accommodations as needed. There is a critical lack of data and little research on the participation of students with disabilities in assessment and accountability systems. As schools and districts implement these policies for inclusion, they will look for precedents and examples of schools that are successfully educating students with disabilities.

This report identifies and describes practices that support the achievement of students enrolled in high performing, high poverty Texas elementary schools. Texas schools were chosen for this study because the state has developed a standards-based accountability system that provides a great deal of data on schools. In addition, Texas has a significant number of high achieving, high poverty elementary schools.

The five schools selected for the study have attained high levels of achievement in the Texas accountability system, which rates elementary schools according to their attendance rates and their student performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. Significantly, the schools profiled in this report met the state's high standards while exempting a low percentage of students with disabilities from taking the TAAS.

These schools prove that it is possible to meet and even surpass high standards while including students with disabilities in state assessments and in the state accountability system. Moreover, they demonstrate forcefully that students with disabilities can be held to challenging academic standards.

Background

This section describes the process used to select the five study schools. Also included are a description of the procedures used for data collection and analysis and a brief description of the organizational structure of the five case study reports.

Selecting the Schools

The goal in selecting schools for this study was to identify high performing, high poverty schools that exempt few students with disabilities from the state's accountability system. When selecting the schools, researchers used school demographics and performance ratings from the 1997–98 school year. Table 1 lists the selected schools.

Table 1: Five Schools Studied

School	District	City
Baskin Elementary School	San Antonio Independent School District	San Antonio
Canterbury Elementary School	Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District	Edinburg
Loma Terrace Elementary School	Ysleta Independent School District	El Paso
T. W. Ogg Elementary School	Brazosport Independent School District	Clute
Lora B. Peck Elementary School	Houston Independent School District	Houston

Researchers used the following criteria in the selection process:

- The school's 1998 rating in the Texas accountability system;
- The proportion of economically disadvantaged students attending the school;
- The percentage of students with disabilities exempted from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills;
- The school's general admission criteria; and
- The diverse demographic characteristics and geographic locations of the schools.

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Accountability rating

Researchers chose schools that had earned an Exemplary or Recognized rating based on the Texas accountability system for the 1997–98 school year.[1] The accountability system rates schools according to their attendance rates and their student performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. In elementary schools, the test measures student mastery of the statewide curriculum in reading and mathematics at grades 3 through 6 and in writing at grade 4. Spanish-version reading and mathematics tests are administered at grades 3 through 6, and in writing at grade 4.

Four of the selected schools served prekindergarten through grade 5, while one school also served grade 6. Thus, the TAAS performance ratings of these schools reflect student TAAS results in grades 3 through 5 in four of the schools and in grades 3 through 6 at the remaining school.

For a school to achieve Recognized status, at least 80 percent of its students who take the TAAS must pass the reading, writing, and mathematics subtests. In addition, at least 80 percent of each student subpopulation must pass the reading, writing, and mathematics subtests. Student attendance must be at least 94 percent for each subpopulation. For a school to achieve Exemplary status, at least 90 percent of its students and of each student subpopulation who take the TAAS must pass the reading, writing, and mathematics subtests. Student attendance must be at least 94 percent for each subpopulation. For the purposes of the accountability system, subpopulations are categorized according to ethnicity and economic disadvantage. Table 2 provides TAAS passing rates and student attendance rates for each school for the 1997–98 school year.

Table 2: Percentage of Students Passing TAAS Exams and Attendance Rates (1997–98)[2]

School	TAAS Reading	TAAS Writing	TAAS Mathematics	Attendance Rate
Baskin	97.5	100	94.9	96.7
Canterbury	98.5	97.2	97.6	97.8
Loma Terrace	94.3	100	97.3	97.6
Ogg	95.4	96	95.5	97.2
Peck	95.3	100	95.3	95.4

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

Proportion of economically disadvantaged students

Researchers chose schools with at least 60 percent of the student population qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch in the National School Lunch Program. Participation in this program is commonly used as a measure of poverty in public schools. The 60 percent cut-off was chosen because it exceeds the percentage required for a school to become a Title I schoolwide program. Schoolwide programs have greater flexibility in the use of their federal resources to serve all of the students in the school. At three of the five schools selected, over 88 percent of the students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. Table 3 depicts the percentage of economically disadvantaged students at each school.

Table 3: Percentage of Students Qualified for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch (1997–98)

School	Percentage Qualified for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
Baskin	92
Canterbury	60
Loma Terrace	88
Ogg	61
Peck	92

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

Exemption from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills

Students with disabilities may be exempted from taking the TAAS and being included in the school's accountability rating. This is a determination made by the school's Admission, Review, and Dismissal committee, which develops individualized education programs for each student receiving special education services. Students exempted are not required to take any portion of the TAAS. Researchers looked for schools that exempted relatively few students with disabilities. Four of the five schools selected for this study exempted an extraordinarily low percentage of students with disabilities from the state accountability system for the 1997–98 school year.

1 The four levels of ratings for schools are Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, and Low-Performing.

2 Unadjusted scores as reported by the Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System in 1998 and used for school accountability rating purposes. (*Source:* www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/98/index.html)

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Though 5.2 percent of students with disabilities were exempted statewide, four of the five schools in this study exempted fewer than 2 percent of students with disabilities from participation in the TAAS.[3] The remaining school exempted 7.8 percent of its students with disabilities. Though this school's exemption rates were slightly higher than the state average, this school was ultimately included in the study in order to ensure ethnic and geographic diversity.

Although not a perfect measure of the achievement of students with disabilities, low exemption rates are evidence of a good faith effort on the part of administration and staff to include students with disabilities—to the fullest extent possible—in schoolwide efforts toward high achievement. Table 4 lists each school's percentage of students in special education who were exempted from taking the TAAS.

Table 4: Percentage of Students Exempted from Taking the TAAS (1997–98)

School	Percentage Exempted from TAAS
Baskin	1.8
Canterbury	0.3
Loma Terrace	1.3
Ogg	0.4
Peck	7.8

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

General admission criteria

Researchers chose schools that did not have selective admissions criteria. The five schools selected for the study were open to any student living in their attendance areas. Each school educated most of the students with disabilities who resided within the boundaries of its attendance area, except in those districts that clustered students at certain campuses to provide bilingual education or special education services to meet specific needs.

Demographic and geographic diversity

After compiling a list of schools eligible for the study, researchers made the final selections with the goal of ensuring demographic and geographic diversity. The five schools selected to participate in the study are in very different locations across the state.

- Baskin is located in San Antonio, the nation's eighth largest city.
- Canterbury is in Edinburg, a small community in the Rio Grand Valley of south Texas.
- Loma Terrace is located on the southeast side of El Paso, just a few miles north of the Rio Grande River and Cuidad Juarez in Mexico.
- Ogg is in the Gulf coast community of Clute, which is known for its petrochemical and fishing industries.
- Peck is one of 186 elementary schools in the Houston Independent School District, the seventh largest public school system in the United States.

Student enrollment at the schools varied from 305 students (at Peck) to 985 students (at Loma Terrace). All the schools studied had a high percentage of minority students. At four of the schools the majority of students were Hispanic, and at one of the schools—Peck—the majority of students were African American. See Table 5 for each school's demographic information.

Table 5: Demographic and Designation Information on Selected Schools (1997–98)

School	Enrollment	Economic Disadv.*	African American	Hispanic	White	Special Ed Enrollment	LEP**
Baskin	440	92%	6%	75%	18%	14.3%	9%
Canterbury	597	60%	1%	87%	11%	6.5%	13%
Loma Terrace	985	88%	1%	96%	3%	8.8%	35%
Ogg	557	61%	15%	57%	28%	13.6%	26%
Peck	305	92%	72%	27%	1%	6.6%	26%

* percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch
** percentage of students with limited English proficiency

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

[3] In the 1999-2000 school year, Texas pilot-tested an alternative assessment, the State-Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA), which assesses special education students in grades 3 to 8 who are receiving instruction in TEKS but for whom TAAS is an inappropriate measure of their academic progress. The SDAA is designed in such a way as to bridge into the TAAS and is expected to become part of the school accountability system in the 2002-03 school year.

Collecting and Analyzing the Data

Researchers used qualitative research methods to understand the complex processes and practices that have led to outstanding academic success at the five study schools. They conducted open-ended interviews and focus groups, observed classes, and reviewed school and student records, including the individualized education programs of students who receive special education services. The researchers obtained informed consent from each of the respondents before participation and followed specific procedures to ensure student confidentiality.

In spring 2000, teams of two to three researchers made two visits to each of the five schools. During the visits, they conducted individual interviews with school administrators and special education teaching staff, as well as with the district administrators directly responsible for supervision of the special education personnel. They conducted individual and focus group interviews with most of the regular education teachers and support staff. Researchers also interviewed as many parents of students who received special education services as were available. Finally, researchers observed special education and regular education classes, after-school programs, and the interactions of children and adults while in the hallways, cafeteria, and playground.

Individual and focus group interviews were audiotaped and transcribed to ensure accurate and complete data collection. After the visits, researchers conducted follow-up phone interviews with school administrators or special education staff to establish sources of information and to verify information gathered.

The research team held debriefing meetings after each round of visits to identify additional information to be gathered and to share their findings. These frequent meetings provided opportunities to begin the identification of commonalities among the schools, and to develop a common coding scheme to facilitate cross-site comparisons. The data were then analyzed using the common coding scheme.

The research team included six individuals with extensive experience and training in qualitative field research. Several team members had been classroom teachers, school administrators, special education instructors, counselors, or district- and state-level administrators. Team members' expertise included special education, early childhood education, Title I programs, and anthropology.

The Case Study Reports

A case study report was developed for each school. The reports provide detailed discussions of the strategies and systems that have contributed to each school's success, as well as general information about the schools, such as demographic information, performance data, and special features and programs. Because this study is concerned with the belief systems, structures, and practices that may contribute to the success of students with disabilities, the case study reports provide a comprehensive analysis of each school rather than a discrete focus on special education programs. While the case studies show similarities in some of the strategies used to ensure student success, they also reflect the unique manner in which each school's staff capitalized on their own strengths to address the strengths and needs of their students.

The Five Study Schools and Their Special Education Programs

The five schools selected for this study were chosen based on performance data from the 1997–98 school year, and the site visits were conducted in spring 2000. During the interim, changes in the state accountability system affected the way that special education exemptions were handled at some of the five schools. These changes notwithstanding, all of the schools continued to demonstrate high levels of student achievement as measured by the TAAS and successfully maintained high expectations for academic success among all students, including those with disabilities.

This section describes changes in the state accountability system that affected statewide exemption trends. This section also provides updated performance data, information about the enrollments of students with disabilities, and a description of the types of special education services the five schools provide.

Exemption Trends in Texas and the Study Schools

Before the 1998–99 school year, students with disabilities could take the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, and schools could exempt their scores from inclusion in their state accountability rating. Beginning in 1998–99, however, policymakers modified the accountability system by requiring that the scores of all students who take the TAAS be included in determining schools' accountability ratings. Under the new requirements, if a student was not exempted from participation in the TAAS by the school's Admission, Review, and Dismissal committee, the student was required to take the test, and the resulting score would be included in the analyses that determine school accountability ratings.

The implementation of this new requirement was the probable cause of a statewide increase in the percentage of students with disabilities exempted from the TAAS. Just 5.2 percent of students with disabilities statewide were exempted in the 1997–98 school year. That number rose to 6.9 percent in 1998–99, when the new requirement went into effect.

Three of the schools in this study conformed to the statewide trend. At Baskin, the special education exemption rate rose from 1.8 percent in 1997–98 to 9.5 percent in 1998–99. Baskin's exemption rate then fell to 7.7 percent in 1999–2000, even though there was an increase in the number of students provided special education services. Despite this increase in students served and the drop in exemptions, 100 percent of Baskin's students served by special education and taking the test passed in both reading and mathematics in 1999–2000.

The special education exemption rate at Loma Terrace was 1.3 percent in 1997–98. The rate rose to 8.8 percent in 1998–99 and dropped to 7.4 percent the following year. Despite this drop in exemptions, TAAS reading and writing scores for students served by special education continued to increase, although mathematics scores fell slightly.

At Ogg, the exemption rate rose from 0.4 percent in 1997–98 to 5.7 percent in 1998–99. The rate increased dramatically in 2000 to 9.4 percent, but the change is due in part to an influx of fourteen new students served by special education that year.

Two of the schools in the study reported decreases in exemption rates despite changes in state accountability requirements. While the special education exemption rate at Peck was 7.8 percent in 1997–98, it fell to 5.1 percent in 1998–99 and remained stable at 5.4 percent the following year. This shift was encouraged by district policy. In the fall of 1998, district administrators announced that no student was to be excluded from the TAAS unless absolutely necessary.

At Canterbury, only 0.3 percent of students with disabilities were exempted in 1997–98 and 1998–99, and *none* were exempted in 2000. Staff at the school report that the historically low exemption rates at the school are the product of a school philosophy grounded in the belief that every student can demonstrate success on the state achievement test.

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Student Performance

Each of the schools demonstrated exceptional academic performance in the few years before the researchers visited in spring 2000. Indeed, student performance ratings were one of the main criteria for inclusion of a school in this study. While three of the schools reflected statewide upward trends in exemption rates in 1999, two of the schools were bringing those rates down in 2000. The third school experienced an influx of students served by special education in 2000. More important for purposes of this study, these schools maintained high levels of performance for all students, and for students served by special education.

It should be noted, however, that performance results at Peck slipped somewhat in 1999 after the district mandated that no student was to be excluded from the state assessment unless it was absolutely necessary, including students receiving special education services and students with limited proficiency in English. Scores rebounded the following year, while Peck also reduced their percentage of students with disabilities exempted from the TAAS.

Enrollments of Students with Disabilities

The percentage of students with disabilities at some of the study schools has changed in recent years. Between 1997–98 and 1999–2000 the percentage of students receiving special education services decreased at Canterbury and Ogg, increased slightly at Peck and Baskin, and increased significantly at Loma Terrace. The increase at Loma Terrace may be a reflection of the school practice of having special education staff provide short-term, intensive assistance to identified students so they could be successful in the regular education program.

At the time of the site visits in spring 2000, two schools had special education enrollment figures well below the state average of 12.1 percent (Peck and Canterbury). During the same time, Loma Terrace had special education enrollment figures that were less than one percentage point higher than the state average. Ogg and Baskin had special education enrollment figures that were less than two percentage points higher than the state average. These numbers reflect district policies that moved students with disabilities to those campuses from other schools in the district. Ogg was the bilingual school for its area of the district and served almost all of the bilingual students with disabilities in its region. Ogg also provided a self-contained life skills program for district students. Similarly, Baskin enrolled students from other schools who needed the services of a behavior improvement program.

Range of Special Education Services

In Texas, the responsibility for providing special education programs rests with school districts. When Admission, Review, and Dismissal committees determine the appropriate services for students with low-incidence disabilities, districts often provide these services by clustering students with like needs at campuses as near to the students' neighborhoods as possible, and at a school that has space for one or more of these special units.[4] Hosting several of these special programs can cause the percentage of students identified for special education services at a particular campus to increase. On the other hand, the more of these district programs a school provides, the more likely it is to be able to serve all the students with disabilities in the school's attendance area.

The range and types of special education services provided at the five schools varied according to their population, focus, and role in the district. Peck, for instance, provided speech therapy and resource support on campus, and sent some students to a nearby school to attend a preschool program for children with disabilities.

Similarly, Loma Terrace provided speech therapy and daily resource classes. A few students from the Loma Terrace attendance area with low-incidence disabilities attended another school in the district.

Baskin provided speech services and resource and itinerant support services to its students, plus a district behavior improvement program and a district pre-primary child development program. A few students from Baskin who required more intensive instruction in a self-contained setting attended a district program at a nearby school. Because of the low numbers of students with limited English proficiency at Baskin, the school did not provide a bilingual education program. Consequently, if one of Baskin's students had limited English proficiency *and* required special education services, the district provided those services at a nearby school with a special education teacher certified to teach bilingual education.

[4] A low-incidence disability is any disability that is diagnosed less frequently than all other disabilities, such as autism, emotional disturbance, traumatic brain injury, multiple disabilities, and mental retardation.

With a relatively small number of students, Canterbury was able to provide speech therapy and special education services ranging from self-contained services for students with low-incidence disabilities, to consultation services to regular education teachers after students had been exited from the special education program. Canterbury provided services to all of the students in its attendance area, and also provided a preschool program for children with disabilities from around the whole district.

Ogg provided speech therapy and a developmental learning cluster and resource classroom to students from its attendance area, a district early education program, and a district self-contained life skills program. Ogg was also designated as the bilingual education campus for the north part of Brazosport and provided special education services for children in the northern part of the district with both limited English proficiency *and* a need for special education services.

Improvement Strategies

The goal of this research effort was to identify and describe the factors that have most significantly contributed to supporting the achievement of students with disabilities in the five schools studied. This section discusses the impact on student achievement of the schools' culture, leadership, communication systems, and academic intervention strategies.

Setting High Expectations for All Students

Among the most striking characteristics is the extent to which the school communities embrace the belief that all students can be academically successful. At each school, the overriding goal is to ensure that all students perform at grade level or better. School leaders and staff minimize the role of formal categories or labels such as "special education" or "limited English proficiency" in setting expectations. Instead, they set measurable and high goals for all students. With this philosophy, faculty and staff at the five schools focus on early, intensive intervention efforts to bring students to grade level by the first grade. They also create opportunities for students of all ability levels to interact and use assessment data to discover areas for improvement in both student and teacher performance.

At Baskin Elementary School, staff encourage high achievement beginning with a student's earliest contact with the school. Baskin's Pre-Primary Child Development program, provided to three- and four-year-olds with disabilities, is designed to equip students for success in the regular education curriculum.

Similarly, Loma Terrace Elementary School offers a sequence of early intervention programs designed to help parents of infants and toddlers begin preparation for school. Indeed, every aspect of the Loma Terrace experience reflects the "culture of success" at the school. No opportunity to encourage achievement is missed. Students are invited to express their aspirations on the "dream boards" decorating the halls, and teachers regularly introduce materials and concepts that are up to two grade levels beyond the students' classifications. The results of these efforts are unmistakable. The school has been rated Exemplary under the state's accountability system for four years in a row.

At Ogg Elementary School, kindergarten teachers expect students to perform beyond their grade level. As a consequence, approximately three-quarters of Ogg's kindergarten students are reading, even though the Texas curriculum does not address this skill until the first grade.

Educators at Canterbury Elementary School have developed a school culture that encourages intellectual exploration and achievement. Staff members emphasize development of each student's intellectual interests and refinement of critical thinking skills. Students from all backgrounds and achievement levels, for instance, participate in the school's popular Chess Club. The interaction stimulated by the club has helped students hone their analytic skills and has united them around a common interest. As the principal at Canterbury observed,

> **Chess is open to all children. We've got migrant students playing, we've got bilingual kids, we've got special education, we've got gifted children, we've got the low-level readers. It's a very difficult game, and yet these kids can do it. It's really united [us] because the kids mesh and they come together and they play together, and it's not "Well, I'm GT" or "I'm bilingual," it's just, "We're Canterbury."**

At each school, educators expect the same high level of performance from themselves as from their students. At Baskin, for instance, teaching staff reviewed curriculum content and teaching methodology after noticing that student performance had begun to slip. Though at first, staff thought that the school's changing demographics might be the reason for the decline, careful self-examination led them to conclude that it was their own performance that was really at issue. After revisiting how and what they taught, teachers were able to reverse the trend. The next year, they set and met higher goals.

Teachers at several of the schools use student test results to assess themselves as well as their students. At Peck, for instance, if students in a class tend to underperform on a particular aspect of the state assessment, the teacher usually responds by looking

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for ways to improve his or her own skills in teaching the objective. The principal at Loma Terrace described a similar sense of accountability among his teachers:

> Our teachers, they don't give excuses. We're in a culture of success and we don't accept excuses. Children can learn. All children can. You might have to work a little harder, you might have to overcome a few obstacles, because we realize that our kids statistically are underdogs, but we won't accept that and the people won't accept that. If the student is here, we've got to teach them. We've got to work on those obstacles.

A teacher at Canterbury expressed the same sentiment succinctly: "We're accountable."

Teachers at Ogg share a common vision and agree on specific learning objectives. Moreover, having agreed upon these objectives, they simply do whatever it takes to make sure their students achieve. A program specialist at the school explained:

> Very few people, if you ask them to do something in this school, balk at doing it . . . . They are more than willing to do it if they possibly can and that includes coming early, staying late, whatever it takes. Because, like we say, children come first . . . . They're willing to come and give that extra time and extra effort if it'll pull these kids up where they need to be.

Sharing Leadership and Staying Engaged

Administrators in the five study schools look for teachers who share beliefs critical to school success. They encourage teacher creativity and leadership and actively support effective classroom instruction. They try to relieve teachers of noninstructional duties so teachers can focus more on teaching. Administrators also ensure that their resource allocation decisions support high quality instruction. They collaborate with teachers and support staff and take an active role in formulating instructional strategies.

The principal at Loma Terrace takes care to find staff who share beliefs critical to the school's success, such as a commitment to the goal that students will master curriculum beyond their grade level. In some cases, the teachers who choose these schools are a self-selecting group. At Ogg, applicants are likely to be well aware of the school's reputation for hard work and high expectations before they apply for employment at the school. As one district administrator noted,

> If you come and interview in this district, you're going to know that there are high expectations. If you're not willing to go the extra mile that it takes, this isn't the place. I think people know that. But they also know that we care about kids, and that's real evident [at Ogg], too.

Administrators look for and encourage leadership among the teachers. For example, the principal at Loma Terrace recognized that the special education teachers had teaching skills that would be valuable to all teachers on the campus, so he asked them to attend district training on the new state standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. These two teachers then returned to the campus and took a leadership role in organizing and providing this training for all faculty.

Administrators at the five study schools also value the contribution of talented staff. An assistant principal at Loma Terrace described the role of administration at the school:

> We don't get in [the teachers'] way, but what we try to do is to communicate and then allow the teachers to come together. And often they come up with solutions. We don't. We're not solution givers. Our solutions are only from our little narrow perspective. But when you get teachers together you have much more powerful solutions.

This willingness of administrators to allow teachers to find creative solutions is also integral to success at Ogg. Teachers at Ogg deeply appreciate that they "have a principal that will let you try an idea." For example, Ogg has a team-taught writing program for all fourth graders, an idea first proposed by a teacher. Administrators at Ogg further support teachers by getting them the materials they need and helping clear the way of bureaucratic hurdles so that teachers can focus on instruction.

Teaching staff at Canterbury reported a similar philosophy at their school. They described their proposal that the school purchase a program designed to prepare prekindergarten and kindergarten students to read. The administration listened to the teachers, acted on the request, and watched the results. Based on Canterbury's success, the district now provides the program to all kindergarten classes in the district.

The Canterbury example illustrates the role of successful administrators in aligning resources with instructional priorities. At Peck, administrative staff are willing to make difficult financial decisions to accommodate student needs. In one instance, the principal recognized that, on the whole, third-grade students were not performing as well as expected. Though the classroom teacher and support personnel were focusing on the problem areas, progress wasn't sufficient. The principal recognized that a sacrifice would have to be made in another area in order to

remedy the problem. She used part of her Title I funds to hire an additional third-grade teacher and thus reduce the third grade's student-teacher ratio.

Finally, administrators in these five schools remain engaged in instructional decisions and in day-to-day activities in the schools. They are visible on campus and frequently participate in planning and instructional activities. The principal at Peck, for instance, personally schedules all students, matching student needs to teaching strengths. At Canterbury, the principal chairs all Admission, Review, and Dismissal committee meetings held for students with disabilities. Ogg's principal participates as a tutor in the school's daily Assistant Component/Enrichment program, leads an after-school enrichment program, and makes an effort to work with and get to know every classroom of students on campus.

Encouraging Collaboration Among Faculty and Staff

Each of the five study schools represents an educational community in which every teacher is invested in the success of every student. This sense of shared responsibility is both a catalyst for and the result of frequent communication and collaboration among teachers. Faculty and staff at these schools are accustomed to turning to one another for help. They collaborate both by providing instructional support for students outside their regular classes and by offering advice and ideas to one another when student learning difficulties arise.

In some cases, educators use curriculum programs to further ensure collaboration, such as at Peck, where teachers work from the same curriculum programs in reading (Success for All) and mathematics (Move-It Math). In this way, teachers take responsibility not only for the students in their classroom, but for all students on campus. They view themselves as members of a team dedicated to the overall success of the school. Peck has a daily campuswide reading program in which the school's regular education teachers, special education teachers, teacher aides, and support program personnel each lead a small reading group. The school's reading specialist explained the collateral benefits of such a program:

> It's not just that you know your homeroom class; you know other kids and you can meet their needs in a lot of different ways. We work together as a team and we can collaborate and get together during planning times or when we have [Success for All] meetings, and see how the kids are moving along and compare notes as to where they were at the beginning, as to where they are now. . . . So we're real knowledgeable about all of the kids as opposed to just one group of kids.

Thus, the structure of the daily reading program contributes to the school's culture of shared responsibility. Baskin operates a comparable reading program with similar results.

At Loma Terrace, teachers and administrators point to consistency and careful alignment of curriculum across grade levels and programs as a key strategy in their success. All students—in kindergarten through sixth grade, in bilingual classrooms and resource classrooms—are taught with the same curriculum and instructed using similar teaching strategies.

Educators at Canterbury also recognize the importance of collaboration in achieving student success, but this has been a relatively recent phenomenon. When she joined the school in 1996, the principal observed that teaching staff had become isolated in their program areas. Resolving to bring teachers together across programs, the principal instituted grade-level planning sessions attended by staff from all program areas. The idea was a success:

> I helped them understand that my bilingual teachers have very good expertise that can be shared with everyone. That the GT teachers have great strategies that can be shared. . . . Basically, we helped each other out and this campus became Exemplary.

At Ogg, faculty and staff collaborate to provide variety in instructional strategies. Teachers rely on program support specialists, counselors, and administrators to help teach and reinforce new concepts and lessons. This type of collaboration is facilitated by the campus Assistance Component/Enrichment program. Each day between 12:30 and 1 p.m., teachers collaborate with support staff in conducting special tutoring and enrichment activities for students having difficulties with particular objectives. Through this program, students have the opportunity to learn curriculum objectives through several different perspectives. A teacher described the advantages of this process:

> They hear the same objectives with different words from four different people. We hit them from all these different directions. Sometimes you say it and it doesn't click, and then I say the exact same thing and the light bulb goes on.

This kind of collaboration is supported by frequent interaction among the school's teachers, tutors, and support program specialists.

Using Assessment Data to Support Student Success

With regular student assessment and the strategic use of data, staff at the five study schools identify barriers to learning as early as possible so they can develop intervention strategies. Data from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, reading inventories, and early intervention programs enable faculty and support staff to focus on each student's areas for improvement. Timely intervention helps ensure that students do not fall behind grade level.

Administrators at both the district and campus levels are actively involved in the gathering, analysis, and use of student achievement data. Indeed, at the campus level, the principal, assistant principal, and/or curriculum assistant may analyze the data by student, by teacher, and by grade level. If any student is failing to make sufficient progress, administrators meet with the student's teachers to assist in developing an intervention strategy. Administrators and faculty use assessment data to identify students in need of one-on-one tutoring, small-group instruction, and other types of support.

At Canterbury, staff place a special emphasis on addressing barriers to learning while students are in prekindergarten to first grade. In the first grade, for instance, students are evaluated based on the Texas Primary Reading Inventory and observations of student performance in the classroom. Students identified as experiencing difficulty are placed in programs where they can receive additional assistance.

Students at Ogg also benefit from an extra effort to identify barriers early in a student's educational experience. The district's reading initiative task force recently developed its own end-of-year reading test that meets state requirements for kindergarten, first, and second grades. Additionally, staff at Ogg conduct a pretest at the beginning of the year and a benchmark test in December. A first-grade teacher described how the results of these assessments come into play in the classroom:

> It's real individualized. It gives us really good information. It's real time consuming, but it's really worth it because I can look at a child and say, "She's not using her visual clues enough," or "She's not using her phonetics."

At Loma Terrace, early intervention is facilitated by the school's Ready to Be Ready program aimed at parents of infants and toddlers. Teachers report that parents who have participated in the program are better able to identify difficulties that their children are experiencing and bring them to the school's attention. And because the kindergarten program is focused on early literacy, teachers can identify potential learning problems before a student enters first grade.

As is true at several of the schools, the strong assessment program at Loma Terrace extends throughout the grades served by the school. For instance, teachers in kindergarten through second grade use the Texas Primary Reading Inventory to assess student progress, while teachers in third through sixth grades use TAAS results to monitor student achievement and identify areas for improvement. The school's principal described this approach: "We know everything about these kids. We use data for one purpose: to find out where kids are weak and to attack those weaknesses."

Similarly, at Ogg, students in all grades are tested frequently. Rather than just giving the benchmark TAAS every nine weeks, for instance, teachers assess students in the upper grades weekly. Frequent feedback isolates problem areas and gives teachers the opportunity to refine their strategies and teach the objective again before moving along in the curriculum plan

Keeping the Focus on Students

Staff at the five schools studied are committed to putting the needs of children before all others. They focus on individual student needs and encourage students to become involved in extracurricular activities. As the principal at Ogg explained,

> We've worn "Children First" pins for probably eight or nine years. The reason we do that is because the philosophy is, you do what's best for kids. Things come up and you look at it and you think, "Well, this might be best for the teacher and not right for the kid." We're going to make our decisions based on what's best for the kids.

The impact of this philosophy on everyday life at Ogg is obvious. Teachers explain that the school's emphasis on student-centered learning enables them to focus on instruction. As one teacher observed, "This is the best school as far as being allowed to do our job and not have to do a lot of extra fluffy stuff. We literally do our job."

At Peck, the "children first" philosophy is expressed in the attention paid to finding the ideal approach to teaching each child. For instance, when deciding which interventions to use with a student, the principal, teachers, and support staff at Peck draw on what they know about the student personally as well as academically. A conversation between the principal and the reading program facilitator, reported by the principal, illustrates the importance of this idea at Peck:

> The [reading program] facilitator came to me and said, "Ms. Goodwin, this child needs for us to start tutoring immediately." And I said, "Okay. What are the needs? Who do you think is the best person to work with this child?" She said, "This person is real committed. She's going to have that soft-spoken kind of nurturing personality that's needed to sit there with this child and pump her up and keep her going."

The staff at Baskin are similarly focused on the individual needs of students. The faculty and administration have created many opportunities for students to receive small-group instruction. Support teachers often help classroom teachers provide small-group reading and mathematics instruction. Special education teachers participate in regular classroom instruction by providing small-group or individual re-teach opportunities, monitoring students during direct instruction, or assisting with modifications during guided and independent practice.

At Canterbury, the school's focus on students' individual interests stems naturally from the school's origin as a gifted and talented magnet school. Administrators and teachers at Canterbury provide all students with opportunities to explore areas of personal strength and interest. Staff believe that their approach to building on student interests is critical to student performance. Students at all performance levels benefit from enrichment activities and contests, many of which build on the state curriculum. The school's popular Chess Club attracts students from all backgrounds and academic histories. Additionally, competitions offered through the University Interscholastic League have given a broad range of students the opportunity to excel. Recently, for instance, a student whose parents are migrant workers and who misses the beginning and end of each school year, placed first in the regional Number Sense competition.

Canterbury's focus on students as individuals also comes into play when students experience difficulties in class. In these instances, teachers look for ways to modify instruction to meet the needs of the student. They target the objectives at issue through one-on-one tutoring and support programs; consult with other teachers and administrators on how to best reach the students; and actively engage parents in activities that complement classroom instruction. When, for example, a third-grade teacher determined that a student was lacking some basic math skills, she made every effort to calibrate her instructional techniques to the specific needs of the student:

> We're using base-10 blocks. . . . We're tutoring. I do one-on-one with her. I've also approached [the principal] and we've talked about strategies we can do. . . . Her parents and I have really worked together with her and [the student is] also involved in the planning. I'll ask her, "What do you think we should do? What will work for you?" She'll tell me, "If we stay after school and if you do this and you help me with that. . . ." It's a lot of communication between the student and the teacher and the parents.

Addressing Barriers to Learning

Though educators at each of the five schools focus on students' academic lives, they recognize that a wide variety of issues impact learning. Faculty and staff at these schools believe that creative use of resources and multiple intervention strategies are necessary to effectively address these issues. Administrators, faculty, support program specialists, and counselors work together to ensure that students receive the additional help they need. Staff pay careful attention to early signs of difficulties and are flexible in adjusting intervention strategies to the needs of students. Additionally, appropriate and timely interventions are facilitated by institutional structures such as formal teams that meet to address student issues collaboratively.

Teachers at Ogg take a multifaceted approach to student learning problems. At all grade levels, students who are experiencing difficulty often receive double and triple doses of instruction—through tutoring, classroom instruction, the school's support program specialists—as well as counseling support, as needed. Further, teachers make an effort to be creative when responding to difficulties. For example, a first-grade teacher observed that a student who had recently transferred to Ogg was having trouble with reading and that this problem was exacerbated by low self-esteem. The teacher tried an experiment:

> I looked at the books and said, "How about your taking that book home and bringing it tomorrow and reading it to the class?" He read only a few pages to the class, but the kids clapped and said he was doing great. The next day, he asked if he could do it again.

This example also illustrates the importance of flexibility and persistence when confronted with a student's learning difficulties. Before trying the approach she described, the teacher had first offered small rewards as a way of encouraging progress. When she saw that this technique was inappropriate for the student, the teacher re-evaluated the situation and tried another approach.

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Teachers at Loma Terrace emphasize the importance of recognizing the first signs that a student may be having difficulties that affect learning. By remaining attentive to each student, teachers can resolve minor issues before they become major problems. A veteran teacher at the school explained that sensitivity to shifts in student performance combined with proactive efforts to explore the reasons for the shift can intercept many problems before they seriously disrupt a student's education.

Baskin's Adopt-a-Student initiative provides a formal structure for this kind of proactive approach. The program pairs adults at the school with students who teachers have identified as needing extra support. Adults from all areas of the school, including teachers, administrators, support personnel, and librarians, participate in the program. They support and encourage adopted students by checking in with them daily, helping celebrate successes, and offering regular motivation through positive notes and small motivational tokens.

Finally, all of the schools employ teams of professionals that convene to help teachers explore alternatives for addressing barriers to learning. At Baskin, the school's Student Support Team meets when teachers identify a student who continues to have difficulty despite ordinary intervention strategies. The team includes the student's teacher, the counselor, and the principal. Once the student's case is referred to the team, the group meets at least three times to review the student's progress, discuss previous interventions, and suggest new strategies. The other four study schools have similar teams.

Reinforcing Classroom Learning at Home by Engaging Families

Staff at the five study schools take many extra steps to ensure the involvement of parents in their child's educational program. Parent liaison positions were created to bridge the gap between school personnel and parents in some of the schools. Teachers call parents frequently—not to report problem behavior but to report successes or ask for help when their child is not succeeding in the classroom. Parents are looked to for support and assistance in reaching their child and are regarded as the best source of information when the child is experiencing difficulty in school.

The staff at Baskin work especially hard to engage the parents of children receiving special education services. These parents are viewed as a critically important part of the educational team. Accordingly, staff endeavor to keep them involved in every aspect of the child's life at school—the difficulties and the achievements.

Embracing the belief that "nobody knows the student better than the parent," teachers at Loma Terrace undertake their work with the assumption that the parent is a key partner. They believe this to be especially true when convening parents for the initial special education meeting. They recognize that nothing is more important than making parents feel that they are respected when it comes to making decisions about their child's educational future.

Teachers at Loma Terrace communicate with all parents through the use of a daily homework folder. The homework folder establishes a habit of daily communication between home and school. Although correspondence may be infrequent for weeks at a time, both teachers and parents know that there is a system in place for communicating praise or concerns.

The principal and staff at Peck have also made a conscious effort to involve parents in their child's education before problems arise. At the beginning of the school year, teachers call parents to introduce themselves and share their home phone numbers. When parents have questions or need help with homework assignments, they can call the teacher directly. Peck also sponsors a Family Support Team that enables teachers and parents to meet to resolve problems related to a student's learning. This program reflects the school's efforts to work as a team with parents and to achieve consistency between what happens at home and school.

When learning difficulties do arise, teachers reach out to parents for information and support. At Canterbury, for instance, teachers explain to parents the specific objectives where the child is experiencing problems. They provide parents supplemental materials for use at home and are receptive to learning about events in the student's life that might be affecting academic performance.

In short, parents are viewed as important contributors to the success of each of the five schools in this study. Parents at these schools commonly contribute ideas, time, and assistance. This effort helps the schools become more responsive to the strengths and needs of students.

Systems for Identifying Interventions Before Diagnostic Testing

Educators at the five study schools consider special education referral as the intervention of last resort. Administrators and teachers at Ogg, for instance, believe that most learning difficulties

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experienced by students can be addressed through the school's regular education program. Formal prereferral review teams are employed at each of the schools to ensure that all alternatives are explored before a student is referred for testing. These alternatives may include class-size reduction, work on primary basic skills, pullout programs, and remedial programs.

At Loma Terrace, to ensure that the referral is appropriate and the last resort, all referrals must first be presented to the Child Studies Team. The only exception to this requirement occurs when the parent requests the testing. Only about half of the original referrals to the Child Studies Team eventually go on to become referrals for special education testing, and about 80 percent of those referrals are identified as eligible for special education services.

Peck and Canterbury have created similar systems to prevent inappropriate referrals. At Canterbury, the Student Staff Assistance Team must be satisfied that every possible intervention has been tried before a referral is initiated. At Peck, the process involves an Intervention Team, a program developed by the district to help teachers identify additional strategies to try in the classroom before referral for diagnostic testing.

Ogg staff experiment with a variety of intervention strategies before concluding that a referral is appropriate. Prereferral strategies include class-size reduction, work on primary basic skills, pullout programs, Reading Recovery, and interactive writing.

Baskin established the Student Support Team to help teachers address learning problems as soon as they were identified. The team includes the student's teacher, the counselor, and the principal. Parents are invited to discuss their child's difficulties after the team has conducted a review of the student's situation. The principal at Baskin expressed support for this approach: "If we've tried everything that we know [is] available to us, then we will ask the parent for permission to test the child."

Because language barriers sometimes complicate identification of disabilities, staff at the schools make special efforts to address this issue in the prereferral process. At Loma Terrace, for example, where a high percentage of students do not speak English as their native language, the Child Studies Team and diagnostician endeavor to make sure that a student's difficulties with English are not mistaken as a learning disability, or, conversely, that learning problems are not obscured by a lack of fluency in English. If testing is deemed necessary after review by the team, the test may be administered in both languages. The eligibility criteria must be met in both languages before a referral for special education services is made.

Defining Special Education as the Path to Success in the General Education Program

Educators at the five study schools also share a view of special education as a means to fully integrate students with disabilities into the regular education program. Teaching staff at these schools aim to help students who receive special education services return to a full-time regular education program as quickly as possible. Students are provided every means of support and assistance they need, but educators view placement in special education as a temporary rather than permanent placement.

At Canterbury, teachers in the Gifted and Talented, regular education, and special education programs at each grade level get together to work on lesson plans, identify resources, and share strategies that work. The special education teacher attends grade-level meetings to ensure that student work in the special education classroom is coordinated with their regular education daily assignments. Moreover, administrators encourage regular education teachers to seek new ideas about teaching strategies from the school's special education professionals. A fifth-grade teacher expressed her gratitude for this kind of assistance, observing that with the advice of a special education teacher she was able to bring a struggling student to grade level and thus avoid an inappropriate referral.

At Baskin, the special education teacher routinely communicates with regular education teachers to ensure curriculum alignment and provide support in areas where students are experiencing difficulty in the regular education classroom. The teachers see this type of communication as essential to maintaining appropriate instructional goals, objectives, and modifications, and to monitoring student progress. The special education teacher also provides support when needed to the regular education teachers to ensure success of all the students.

Administrators at Loma Terrace have created formal and informal structures for interaction between special and regular education program staff. The principal explained, "We try to give them opportunities that compel them to work together." More specifically, administrators carefully assign and distribute responsibilities to ensure that all staff members are able to "earn respect through their deeds," and are seen as valuable members of the school team. Perhaps as a consequence of the administration's support of cross-program collaboration, special education professionals

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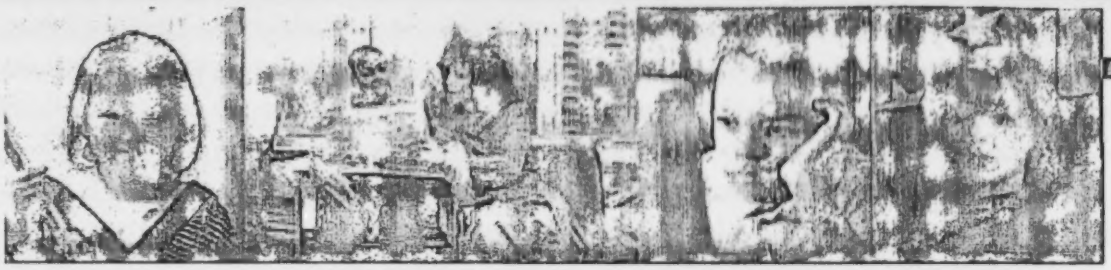
at Loma Terrace clearly view themselves as integral to the success of the regular education program.

Teachers at Peck also share the view that special education staff offer valuable resources to the regular education program. In fact, one teacher spoke of asking her special education students to share the strategies that they learned in the resource room with classmates. The mutual respect across programs is evident. Just as regular education teachers value the contributions of special education staff, the special education teacher at Peck gave credit for much of the success of his students to the collaboration between classroom teachers and caregivers or parents.

As a result of their efforts to align regular and special education curriculum, teachers at these schools report that they are frequently able to include students with disabilities in regular education programs. All teachers work together to maintain high standards and provide quality curriculum to students with disabilities. As one Baskin teacher explained, "They are all Baskin students. We all speak the same language when we try to prepare them in their academics as well as their community life."

Similarly, at Ogg, all students are considered part of the Ogg family. Under the district's leadership, as many students with disabilities as possible are kept at their home campus. "The school is better equipped to take care of their own kids because they know the parent," explained one district administrator. All Ogg students are expected to succeed, disabilities notwithstanding. Moreover, the staff at Ogg make sure that students receiving special education services feel welcome at the school and that they know that they are valued. The parent of two students who received special education services at Ogg expressed his appreciation of this approach: "I think the kids feel loved here. I can't put it any more plainly than that."

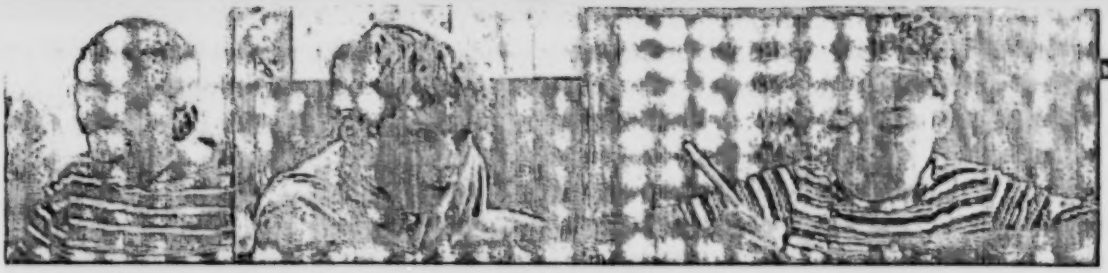


Recommendations

- **Support high expectations by recognizing and rewarding exceptional achievement by all students.** Policymakers should enact accountability systems that measure the performance of all students based on data disaggregated by student subgroups. Policies should ensure that incentives for the appropriate inclusion of students in assessment are built into the accountability system. Exceptional performance among all student groups should be rewarded by the system.
- **Limit campus-level regulations that unduly restrict the discretion of school administrators and teachers.** The best solutions to learning difficulties often arise from the creativity and collaborative effort of a school's faculty and staff. State and local policymakers should review requirements that may impinge on opportunities for such campus-level innovation.
- **Provide administrators professional development opportunities that build on their strengths as instructional leaders.** Administrators should be engaged in professional development opportunities that enrich their capacity to assist their teaching staff in developing intervention strategies. Administrators at schools in this study played an active and effective role in improving the academic performance of students.
- **Encourage campus administrators to create opportunities for cross-program communication.** Campus polices and practices should be designed to maximize opportunities for interaction among school professionals with various types of expertise. Policies should, for instance, encourage grade-level staff meetings (rather than meetings segregated by subject area or professional role), campuswide opportunities for collaboration, and more formal venues for interaction, such as prereferral teams.
- **Build the capacity of teachers and administrators to interpret and apply assessment data in classroom instruction.** Every member of a school's professional staff should be trained in the methods of using assessment data to improve classroom instruction.
- **Minimize noninstructional duties of teaching staff.** State and local policies should maximize the time and energy that teachers may devote to instruction and improving instruction through planning, professional development, collaborative work, and other activities.
- **Define special education as a temporary placement in preservice and inservice training programs.** State and local policymakers should work with universities and professional development programs to ensure that they define special education as a temporary placement.
- **Increase opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in schoolwide activities.** Campus leaders should build schoolwide activities that allow interaction among students of different ability levels.
- **Provide opportunities for special program staff to participate and take leadership roles in the larger campus community.** Administrators should be deliberate in providing special education, bilingual education, and other special program staff opportunities to participate in campuswide activities and leadership roles.
- **Ensure that classroom teachers have sufficient flexibility and resources to provide focused intervention when student learning difficulties arise.** Resources should be channeled toward the goal of providing teachers the tools they need for focused intervention. Teaching assistants, schedules that facilitate tutoring, and current assessment data are helpful in this regard.
- **Create school environments that are conducive to candid communication and peer assistance.** Administrators should cultivate the expectation that faculty and staff will seek assistance from one another. Staff should feel safe in acknowledging that they can learn from a peer with more experience or training in a given area.
- **Stimulate proactive elimination of learning barriers.** Administrators should encourage faculty and staff to participate in student mentoring and other support activities, such as Adopt-a-Student, after-school tutoring, and

small-group instruction programs, that mitigate barriers to learning.

- **Incorporate parents into the structures and systems that define schools.** Campus leaders should facilitate and encourage the involvement of parents in decisions affecting their children. Parent meeting rooms, open-door policies, and professional development programs emphasizing the role of parents are some such strategies.
- **Minimize inappropriate referrals for special education services by developing multiple prereferral assessment and intervention strategies.** Faculty and staff should be trained to recognize and address learning problems that may be misidentified as indicators of a disability. Administrators should create opportunities for staff members to collaborate in finding interventions to address such barriers.
- **Promote collaboration between special program and regular education staff through cross-training.** Staff from special programs, such as special and bilingual education, and the regular education program should jointly participate in cross-training activities that will help them recognize the valuable contributions that each area of expertise has to offer.
- **Ensure consistency between the curriculum objectives of regular and special education programs.** Teaching staff from the regular and special education programs should be encouraged to coordinate curriculum objectives of students receiving special education services. Common planning periods and grade-level staff meetings may support such coordination.



Baskin Elementary School

San Antonio Independent School District
San Antonio, Texas

1998–1999 School Year

Student Enrollment	371
Attendance Rate	96.7%
Grades Served	EE–5

Demographics

African American	7.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.3%
Hispanic	74.4%
Native American	0%
White	18.3%
Limited English Proficiency	3.5%
Mobility	38.5%
Low Income (Free or Reduced-Price Lunch)	90.8%
Special Education Enrollment	13.5%

Performance

1998–1999 Texas Accountability Rating	Exemplary
1999–2000 Texas Accountability Rating	Exemplary

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Baskin Elementary School

San Antonio Independent School District
San Antonio, Texas

School Background

Baskin Elementary School is located in San Antonio, Texas—the eighth largest city in the United States with an estimated 1.6 million people. The school sits in a small, quiet neighborhood less than a mile from several busy interstate highways. The building is decorated inside and out with bright pictures and messages of belief in success for all students. Every day, administrators and teachers greet students, parents, and visitors at the front door of the school with smiles, hand shakes, hugs, and encouraging words. These seemingly small interactions reflect Baskin's commitment to communication and teamwork.

Population Served

Baskin's student population fluctuates throughout the year due to the flow of families in and out of the area. In the 1998–99 school year, for example, Baskin's mobility rate[5] was 38.5 percent, compared with the state average of 22 percent. About 74 percent of the students are Latino, 18.3 percent white, 7 percent African American, and .3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander. The number of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch (90.8 percent) is larger than the state average (49 percent). Less than 4 percent of the students have limited proficiency in English. About 8 percent of Baskin students are enrolled in the school's gifted and talented program.

About 13.5 percent of the students at Baskin receive special education services. This percentage includes students from outside the school's attendance area. Baskin houses two special education units that serve students from Baskin and neighboring schools—one for students needing more support in pre-primary skills (Pre-Primary Child Development) and one for behavior management (Behavior Intervention Program). Approximately one-third of the students in these special units are from Baskin's attendance area. Conversely, students who require more intensive instruction in a self-contained setting are provided transportation to and services at a neighboring school. At the time of our visit, 15 girls and 23 boys in kindergarten through grade 5 were receiving special education services. This number excludes students receiving speech services only. Over the past three years, Baskin's special education enrollment has been slightly higher than the state average.

Table 6: Baskin Special Education Enrollment[6]

1997–1998		1998–1999		1999–2000	
School	**State**	**School**	**State**	**School**	**State**
14.3%	12.0%	12.9%	12.1%	13.5%	12.1%

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

Special Features and Programs

Just as Baskin serves special education students from neighboring schools in the district, a nearby school serves students from Baskin's attendance area who require bilingual education. Because of the small number of students identified as having limited English proficiency at Baskin, the district provides transportation and services for students who need instruction and support in their native language at a nearby school. If any of these students were identified as needing special education services, he or she would continue to be served at this neighboring school so that the native language could be used for instruction. Special programs offered at Baskin include Pre-Primary Child Development, the Behavior Intervention Program, and Balanced Literacy.

Academic Performance

Baskin has achieved an impressive record of academic success as measured by the Texas accountability system.[7] For the past two years, the school has received the state's highest rating of Exemplary. To receive an Exemplary rating, an elementary school must have at least a 94 percent attendance rate and more than 90 percent of their students (and of each subgroup of students) passing the

5 A student is considered to be mobile if he or she has been in membership at the school for less than 83 percent of the school year (i.e., has missed six or more weeks at a particular school).

6 These figures are drawn from the Texas Education Agency's AEIS website (www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis) and represent the enrollment reported to TEA as of the last Friday in October of each school year.

7 The accountability system rates elementary schools according to their attendance rates and their student performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The four levels of ratings for schools are Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, and Low-Performing.

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Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS).[8] For the past two years, Baskin students have consistently performed at these high levels on the TAAS reading, writing, and mathematics tests. Indeed, in the 1999–2000 school year, 100 percent of Baskin students who participated in the assessment passed the reading and mathematics sections of the TAAS.

When Texas first included students with disabilities in accountability measures (in 1999), the number of Baskin students exempt from assessment increased dramatically, to over the state average, while the number of students with disabilities remained stable. In 2000, however, when the number of students served in special education at Baskin increased, the number of special education exemptions dropped by almost two percent.[9] Despite this drop in exemptions, 100 percent of Baskin's students taking the test passed in both reading and mathematics in 1999–2000.

Table 7: Baskin Students Passing the TAAS*

	1997–1998[10]		1998–1999[11]		1999–2000	
	School	State	School	State	School	State
TAAS Reading	88.4%	83.3%	96.5%	86.3%	100%	87.4%
TAAS Writing	91.1%	84.2%	100%	87.9%	98.4%	88.2%
TAAS Mathematics	87.8%	80.4%	94.1%	85.6%	100%	87.4%

* Includes all students who participated, including students with disabilities.

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

Table 8: Baskin Special Education Students' Performance and Participation on the TAAS

	1997–1998		1998–1999		1999–2000	
	School	State	School	State	School	State
Performance (% Passing)						
TAAS Reading	50%	51.1%	100%	66.6%	100%	71.0%
TAAS Writing	42.9%	46.0%	*[12]	62.7%	*	65.6%
TAAS Mathematics	59.3%	46.7%	90%	64.6%	100%	71.1%
Participation (% Exempt)[13]	1.8%	5.2%	9.5%	6.9%	7.7%	7.1%

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

Getting All Students to Achieve High Levels of Success

The staff at Baskin feel that all students can have academic success. They set high goals for their students and then work collaboratively to help students achieve those goals. The administrators, teachers, and support staff make efforts to know every student in the school and understand their academic needs. This practice, along with several support systems they have put into place, makes it easier for staff to address barriers to student learning when they arise.

8 The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is a criterion-referenced test given to students in grades 3 through 8 and grade 10. The test is administered during the spring semester of each school year. In elementary schools, the test measures student achievement in reading and mathematics (for grades 3, 5, and 6) and in reading, writing, and mathematics (for grade 4). Students with disabilities may be exempted from taking the test by a school's Admission, Review, and Dismissal committee, which determines the individual education plan for each student in special education. For more information see the glossary in Appendix A. (Source: Texas Education Agency's AEIS Glossary, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis)

9 According to the Texas Education Agency's AEIS website, although it is the intention to test every student in these grades, there are circumstances under which some students are exempted from the test. Students receiving special education services, for example, may receive an ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal) exemption for every test; and students may receive an LEP (Limited English Proficient) exemption for every test. (Source: www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis)

10 Unadjusted scores as reported by the Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System in 1998 and used for school accountability rating purposes. (Source: www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/98/index.html)

11 Beginning in 1999, results also include special education test takers and Spanish-speaking test takers in grades 3 and 4 on the reading and mathematics portions of the TAAS.

12 An asterisk (*) indicates that fewer than five students were in the classification.

13 The percentage exempt, as reported by AEIS, indicates the percentage of students classified as exempt on all three exams.

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Making Sure Students Learn

The staff at Baskin continuously work to improve instruction so that all students learn. They have set common achievement goals and have established high expectations for student performance. Baskin's staff have spent many hours becoming very familiar with the state curriculum standards and the objectives measured by the state assessment. They collaborate with each other and with parents to ensure that students meet or exceed the standards. Grade-level teachers share instructional strategies that have proven successful; support program teachers collaborate with classroom teachers to provide individualized instruction in reading; teachers "share" students so that students can receive instruction at their level in each different subject; and everyone at Baskin works to engage the support and involvement of parents. This collaboration, together with their understanding of each student and his or her academic needs, enables the staff at Baskin to provide the kind of instruction that will ensure the success of each student.

Setting goals and high expectations

Several years ago, educators at Baskin recognized that the demographics of their district were changing, and that they were no longer as successful as they wanted to be in bringing their students to high levels of achievement. The principal, instructional guide, and teachers decided to address this problem first with a close examination of what students are expected to know and be able to do. They carefully analyzed the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) to see what the standards at each grade level are, and examined the TAAS to learn when and how mastery is being measured. They learned that the curriculum they were teaching was not well aligned with either the TEKS or TAAS within and across grade levels. The staff at Baskin immediately began to align the curriculum. They also worked to improve instruction of the curriculum through inservices and off-site professional development training. That first year, student achievement increased dramatically. This convinced most teachers that previous student achievement was not because of their changing student population, but because of what and how they teach.

The next year, they increased their expectation of what the students should achieve and met that goal. Today, high expectations for student achievement are an entrenched part of the culture at Baskin. Teachers throughout the school are able to state very specifically what they expect of their students. They are confident in their ability to bring students to mastery of the TEKS, and are focusing on goals beyond the TEKS. As a fifth-grade teacher succinctly expressed, "We do want them to master TEKS, but that's not enough." The teachers at Baskin want students to understand why they're learning what they're learning and how this learning can be applied, now and in the future. In reading, for example, teachers expect students to be able to read well and with purpose. They expect students to be able to adjust the way they read, depending on the material's content and their purpose. One fourth-grade teacher explained:

> I think we spend an immense amount of time teaching the children how to pick up a math book and read it, how to pick up a social studies book and read it, how to pick up a science book and read it. We spend a lot of time throughout the year training the children on how you go about reading certain books.

Baskin teachers believe that what they teach must be valuable and relevant to their students. They believe that they are preparing their students to be successful in the future, and they want their students to recognize that the skills they acquire will always be useful to them. A fourth-grade teacher shared what she tells her students when learning new skills in mathematics: "This is a lifetime skill. I don't want you to focus on that right now just because the TAAS is coming up. You're going to need it for the rest of your life."

Working together to help students master the curriculum

The staff at Baskin work together and with families to ensure that students meet the school's high expectations for student achievement. Teachers meet to align the curriculum and the strategies that they use in the classroom. Building on each other's strengths, they collaborate to provide instruction that meets the individual needs of students, and they maintain an open line of communication with parents.

According to staff at the school, a cornerstone of Baskin's success is the fact that teachers not only teach the same content but use many of the same teaching strategies. All of the teachers, for example, spiral the curriculum throughout the year so that their students have multiple opportunities to learn essential concepts. This strategy also ensures that students who enter the school later in the year don't miss important content. The coordination of their teaching strategies is facilitated by weekly grade-level meetings, which are used to examine data and make decisions about how to better organize for instruction. The special education teachers attend these meetings to align their work with that of the classroom teachers. Since they participate in all of the grade-level meetings, they also use this time to provide teachers with an overview of what is happening across the school. Beyond the

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weekly meetings, teachers at each grade level take advantage of their common planning times to check in with each other. One teacher explained:

> **Every [day] we end up meeting for five or ten minutes just to make sure we're on track . . . to make sure our kids are where they should be in groups, or just to get something off of our chest. We can just get together and say, "Gosh, it's really frustrating."**

In addition to using many of the same instructional strategies, the teachers at Baskin collaborate to meet the individual needs of students. This is particularly true in reading, where the special education teacher, Behavior Intervention Program teacher, reading teacher, and teacher aides join the classroom teachers three times a week to provide intensive, small-group instruction. With this additional support, teachers are able to work in small classes of students grouped by reading levels. To accommodate this process, the reading teacher takes running records of students' reading ability and groups students according to skill levels.

Teachers regularly assess students' reading abilities to allow for regrouping as students' needs change. With this flexible grouping, students can move to different groups within the same class and to different classes, depending on their academic performance and needs. This "sharing" extends beyond the reading program, as first-grade teachers welcome kindergarten students into their classes to support instruction at their level. Thus, some students can progress quickly, and students who are struggling are provided with additional support in the small groups. One fourth-grade teacher explained, "So if I have a child who's struggling in my room, and I feel like she might benefit from moving to one of the other two rooms, and she does, then she's not going to lose a beat."

To provide teachers with additional support in developing curriculum and trouble-shooting problems in the classroom, the district has created campus "instructional guides." At Baskin, the instructional guide is a teacher with 13 years of experience at the school. She spends 40 percent of her time as the instructional guide, and the other 60 percent of her time as a fifth-grade teacher.[14] As instructional guide, she handles Texas Primary Reading Inventory and TAAS testing, develops programs to support children who are falling behind, and models instruction. As she related,

> **My job is to make [the teachers'] job easier by providing them with materials, analyzing data, setting up different programs to help boost these children who are struggling. Any kind of support that the teachers need, that's what my job is. There are times I go in and I model lessons. I go in and help them as far as how to organize their classrooms, discipline in the classroom, different ways to teach a different lesson. If they're struggling on a lesson I can go in and teach it a different way.**

The instructional guide and teachers at Baskin also identify outside professional development opportunities to enhance their skills.

While working together to improve instruction, the staff at Baskin also work to engage the support of parents. They see parents as important members of the educational team and try to involve them in every aspect of their children's lives at school—in the difficulties and the celebrations. One parent was impressed by how seriously the school took her input:

> **I've had a couple of concerns this year [so I went] to talk to the teacher. And the next time I came around, the principal [asked] to see me, just to let me know what has been done to meet my concern. . . . I've been most impressed!**

To keep parents informed and involved in the education of their children, the principal, counselor, and teachers hold regular parent conferences. Some of these conferences are structured and others are spontaneous, occurring in the halls before and after school, and in front of the building when parents drop off and pick up their children. Moreover, the principal has an open-door policy where parents can come to her at any time with concerns. As a parent noted, "If I have a problem, I can stop in her office, and I can talk to her at any time about anything. I love it." These types of informal communication are a comfortable arrangement for everyone involved. Both teachers and parents talked about how they appreciate the ongoing and flexible nature of communications at Baskin—a system that allows everyone involved with the student to stay informed and to provide suggestions for helping the student succeed.

Knowing students and their academic needs

The staff at Baskin feel it is important to know students and their academic needs. Teachers shared that they know all of the students, and that students know all of the teachers. They describe their relationship with each other and with their students as a "family." Inclusion in this supportive family is considered one means of keeping students from falling behind, and perhaps even from needing special

[14] In 2001–02, she will be a full-time instructional guide.

education services. The counselor described how this family environment supports learning:

> **Even though we do get some kids from rough neighborhoods, they'll come in with an attitude and after a while it's like they've changed their ways. Only because, hey, we try to get them, we try to make them understand that we care. We do a lot of eye contact, a lot of touching, hand shake kind of things, and make them feel like they're part of the school, that we know them, and we like them, and we want them to do well. And they do. They do real well for us. They respond real well to positive reinforcement.**

In addition to knowing students personally, the staff at Baskin also understand each student's academic strengths and needs. Before problems arise, teachers work with students to identify areas where they need additional help. Teachers monitor daily work and talk to students about how things are going. Moreover, they use district and campus assessments to identify areas where students are experiencing difficulty. A new district assessment provides teachers with regular feedback about student progress, and teachers keep in-house running records to routinely monitor student progress. Teachers note that using data has allowed them to examine not only students' strengths and weaknesses but also their own strengths and weaknesses. As the principal explained, "It's a cycle of continuous assessment and alignment of materials and instruction."

Addressing Barriers to Student Learning

The culture of the school supports continued high expectations for all students, even when students are identified as having academic difficulties. The regular education teachers at Baskin assume primary responsibility for identifying and addressing the needs of all students quickly and comprehensively. Rather than finding excuses or lowering their expectations, teachers are known to "rise to the occasion" when students experience difficulty in class and to see the situation as a challenge—for themselves as well as the students. They are proactive when it comes to working with students who are having difficulties—with academics, behavior, or self-esteem—and feel comfortable turning to other teachers, administrators, district support staff, and parents for ideas and assistance.

Three things happen almost simultaneously when learning problems are identified at Baskin. The teacher will talk with the student, talk with the parents, and check the student's Permanent Record card. This card gives a historical record of student progress, difficulties experienced in class, and involvement in programs to support progress. As soon as a teacher identifies a problem, the teacher contacts a parent and then continues to update and use the parent as a resource in providing support—both to the teacher and student. With this support, faculty and staff have implemented several systems to help students who are struggling. These programs create opportunities for specialized small-group instruction, extended opportunities for learning after school, and schoolwide awareness and support of students' self-esteem. Teachers also feel comfortable using a formal system of support when needed: the Student Support Team.

Specialized small-group instruction

The teachers at Baskin recognize the effectiveness of addressing the needs of students in small groups. To this end, faculty and staff have created many opportunities for students to receive small-group instruction that more specifically addresses their needs, as far as instructional delivery and the skills addressed. While all students participate in small-group guided reading instruction, for instance, smaller groups are formed for students who are identified as needing additional support. In this case, at least one of the reading teachers[15] comes into the classrooms to assist the teachers and provide support for these students during instruction. The special education teachers also provide support during reading or mathematics, depending on the specific needs of the students. These teachers monitor students during direct instruction, provide small-group or individual re-teach, or assist with modifications during guided and independent practice.

When support teachers aren't available, classroom teachers create innovative ways to work with small groups or individual students. For instance, teachers have recognized that there isn't time available for grouping in mathematics like there is in reading. To provide appropriate support for students who are having difficulties in mathematics, one primary teacher explained, "One of the things that I've tried to do is to take at least one day a week when I can give them some independent work to do, and then I can pull those kids who are having trouble aside [to work with them individually]."

Another innovative program that allows teachers the opportunity to work with students in small groups is the Math Pentathlon. For this activity, third, fourth, and fifth grades take turns meeting in the cafeteria to

[15] Through a district grant, the principal at Baskin was able to hire one full-time and two part-time reading teachers for this school year.

work on mathematics skills. While students are grouped heterogeneously for mathematics instruction in the classroom, the Math Pentathlon allows teachers in the intermediate grades the opportunity to regroup students to address their specific needs. This program was designed by the teachers, runs for approximately four weeks, and serves as a final preparatory program for TAAS. Students meet in the cafeteria and are grouped according to specific skills on which they need additional instruction and support. In these groups, the students get to practice specific skills in a fun, game-like environment. One fourth-grade teacher explained, "During this Pentathlon, we're focusing on their needs." All available faculty and staff join to support this event.

Extended opportunities for learning

For students who need additional instruction and opportunities to learn, the staff at Baskin offer a variety of tutoring programs, both during and after school. Once they've identified students as having difficulty mastering specific skills, for instance, the kindergarten teachers provide students with multiple opportunities for support. During the day, they coordinate schedules with the special education teachers to get their assistance with in-school tutoring. While the class is working in centers, the special education teachers provide individualized instruction to students who are falling behind in reading. Moreover, kindergarten students identified as "at-risk" are provided an additional 20-minute period of instruction after school on any skills they are having difficulty mastering.

All students in kindergarten through fifth grade are eligible to participate in the after-school tutoring program. The principal explained:

> It lasts for 21 weeks. What makes this program really successful—it's our Aim High tutoring program, and that's what it's called for all grade levels—is that we have small groups of students being tutored by the classroom teachers, usually their own teacher. The special education teachers also tutor. Most class sizes are about five students, four or five students to a teacher. They meet twice a week for 45 minutes each session. And then the teachers meet once a week for 40 minutes to look at their data or to plan for their tutoring for that week or the following week.

Teachers and parents have noticed how much the students enjoy the Aim High program, and how much better students perform in class as a result of this tutoring.

Support for whole student

In addition to supporting the academic needs of students, faculty and staff work to ensure that the needs of the student as a whole are addressed. To this end, special schoolwide programs offer teachers, administrators, and staff the opportunity to get to know students and help them emotionally as well as academically. The Adopt-a-Student initiative is one such program. Embraced by all at Baskin—teachers, administrators, support personnel, special area (art, music, physical education) teachers, the librarian, and so on—Adopt-a-Student pairs adults at the school with students who have been identified as needing extra support.

Adopters might choose to work with students from a class that they teach, or from a different class or grade level. These adopters see their role as helping "motivate students to do the best they can." This support is expressed through weekly or even daily positive notes to students, and through token motivational gifts such as a pencils or a piece of gum. Adopters make it a point to check in with their students every day to provide positive encouragement and help celebrate small successes, as well as big ones. They enjoy getting to know the students, and students know they have teachers eager to hear about their progress.

The counselor is a key player in addressing the emotional and social needs of students at Baskin. To support individual students, the counselor offers individual and group counseling as part of an established routine. Despite her busy schedule, she also offers "drop-in" service whenever students need extra support, as deemed necessary by students or teachers. She identified this part of her role as supportive, not punitive, even when students are referred to her because of problems with behavior. To provide support to classrooms, the counselor leads a schoolwide guidance program. She explained, "We talk a lot about values and character and things like that. And the teachers support me on that."

A formal system of support—The Student Support Team

When teachers identify a student who is having difficulty despite any strategies, modifications, or accommodations that the school has provided, the Student Support Team (SST) is available to help. Approximately six weeks into the new school year, the counselor sends out a memo to all teachers asking them to provide her with a running list of the students that they are trying to bring up to grade level through modified assignments, small-group instruction, and other interventions. The counselor will then discuss these students with the principal and set up a schedule to monitor student progress. She checks with

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teachers to see if their interventions have been successful. Oftentimes, they have been. When the teacher's interventions have not been successful, the counselor schedules an SST meeting to discuss an individualized support plan for the student.

Recognizing that finding time to schedule meetings can be difficult, the counselor takes a flexible approach to scheduling SST meetings. Meetings are scheduled at whatever time works best for the team—at 7:30 in the morning, during teachers' conference periods, after school. These formal meetings are taken very seriously by the team, which includes the teacher of the student having difficulties, the counselor, and the principal. A special education teacher might also be involved: the resource teacher if the student is demonstrating characteristics of a learning disability, or the BIP (Behavior Intervention Program) teacher if the student is demonstrating behavior problems.

The principal explained the purpose of the SST:

> What we try to do is . . . build a support for the teacher, to make sure that the teacher has—from the special education teachers—some strategies in instruction, classroom management if needed, and also in LD [learning disabilities]. We also [ask] that teacher to start assessing, making sure she's got assessment if it's an LD problem. And then finally, when all those things have been done, then we call the parent in. We sit down with the parent, and we discuss the child's growth or lack of growth or both, and begin to ask the parent for information in terms of "What do you see at home when you try to work with this child?" Recommendations might be made at that time.

At least three SST meetings are held to discuss each case. During these meetings, the team looks at the student's progress, discusses interventions already implemented, and suggests at least one or two strategies for the classroom teacher to try. The procedure and schedule for SST meetings are clear to all involved. As the principal shared, "We always have a date. We set a date [at] each meeting of when we're going to meet again. We discuss the improvement or lack of improvement in the child's learning or behavior. Then we set another goal, what we want to do next." Teachers are very enthusiastic about this process, noting that it provides them with the support they need to help their students be successful.

Approximately three weeks will be allowed between SST meetings. During this time, the principal clarified:

> The resource teacher or the BIP teacher may then be a support for that teacher in terms of implementation, in terms of visiting the classroom to watch the student, and also to help the teacher fine tune the implementation of the suggestions that were made.

While the district diagnostician is available to help teachers during this process, he is rarely called upon for support before a student is referred to special education. The counselor attributes this to the fact that "teachers really work with these kids." She added, "We take a long time to make referrals."

Identifying Students In Need of Special Education Services

When collaborative work with parents and assistance from the Student Support Team do not provide students with the support that they need to be successful, the process of referral for diagnostic testing is initiated. As the principal explained, "If we've tried everything that we know [is] available to us, then we will ask the parent for permission to test the child." According to the staff at Baskin, the purpose of this testing is to identify additional and appropriate interventions and support services for students who have not been successful with previous strategies. These additional and appropriate interventions may include, but are not limited to, placement in the special education program.

The teachers at Baskin make very few referrals for special education testing (fewer than 10 in eight months). This low number was attributed to the strong student support process at the school, as well as the support that teachers receive for increasing their own ability to work successfully with all students. The district diagnostician noted that he is available to help provide input before and during the referral process to answer questions and provide suggestions of strategies or modifications to try with students. He explained that he is most often called only during the final stages of the process, however, to verify that teachers have tried everything possible before referring a student for assessment, and to see if a student qualifies for special education services. He went on to explain how this works at Baskin:

> If you take seriously, from the very outset, that as soon as you see [a student with] an academic difficulty that you're going to hone in with some remedial education measures . . ., you're going to have a more effective school and you're not going to need a whole lot of special education referrals.

While there are no district policies regarding a minimum age or grade for referral to special educa-

tion, referral of students in the early grades (kindergarten through second grade) is generally limited to speech and low-incidence disabilities.[16] Teachers recognize that students are growing developmentally during these early years and, given time, can often be successful without the support of special education services.

The Referral Process

When the Student Support Team (SST) is certain that all other options have been exhausted and agrees that a referral to special education is appropriate, the counselor meets with the parent once again for input, and then conducts observations of the student. Approximately two to three weeks following the SST's decision to refer the student, the counselor provides a package of information to the district diagnostician for assessment purposes. This package includes documentation from the regular education teacher regarding the student's performance, areas where the student is experiencing difficulty, strategies and interventions tried, and the outcomes of different strategies and interventions. It also includes observations by the counselor, and the parent's signed consent to have the student assessed. Once the diagnostician has met with the student, conducted the comprehensive assessment, and compiled a report, an Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meeting is scheduled to discuss the best instructional program for the student.

Admission into Special Education

The staff at Baskin see the ARD meeting as another opportunity for professionals—teachers, administrators, and district support people—to share information about the student (strengths and weaknesses), and to work with the parents in creating an appropriate individualized education program (IEP) for the student. They view the IEP as an action plan for helping the student to succeed.

Each member of the ARD committee recognizes his or her specific role. The principal described her role in this process as answering questions that the parent may have about the programs and serving as a resource. She also explained the importance of making sure parents understand what's happening, because it's easy to slip into "education language." The principal also takes an active role in coordinating decision-making during the ARD meeting. She noted,

> **My other role is to ask good questions, to make sure that everyone understands the services that will be provided both in the regular classroom and in the special education classroom, if the child is in a pull-out program [or provided support within the regular education classroom] . . . . The data, the needs, the quality instruction, the best time to pull out children—we take into consideration all of those things. We make a schedule that's going to benefit the student and we also coordinate services between the regular classroom and special education.**

Many important decisions are finalized during the ARD meeting, including whether or not students will take the TAAS test. This determination is made on an individual case basis, directed by state guidelines.

Ensuring the Success of Students with Disabilities

According to the principal, the goal of the special education program is to support teachers in providing quality instruction to students with disabilities "so that students will be successful in the regular classroom." Teachers share this philosophy, noting that special education should be a support to students in reaching at- or above-grade-level goals in the regular education setting. The district special education supervisor described this as "a healthy attitude." In fact, she attributed the success of Baskin's special education program to this attitude and the dedication of teachers at the school:

> **A general attitude [of achievement] permeates the campus. [The teachers] are achievement oriented. They want to be successful. This stems from the top down. They have an attitude of being here for the students to see that they are successful. I think it's kind of spread out throughout the campus. I think the work ethic is extremely good here, and the motivation has been extremely good.**

The district special education supervisor also stressed that teachers at Baskin work with students "where they are," without excuses: "I think that has been one of the keys here is that [teachers] have been able to do that; they have been able to meet students' needs where they are." To ensure the success of students with disabilities, the staff at Baskin provide a range of specialized services to meet student needs, work to ensure the effectiveness of these services, and

[16] A low-incidence disability is any disability that is diagnosed less frequently than all other disabilities, such as autism, emotional disturbance, traumatic brain injury, multiple disabilities, and mental retardation.

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monitor continuously the appropriateness of each student's individualized educational program.

Range of Special Education Services

While students with disabilities are provided access to supports available for all students needing help in class, they are also provided a wide range of special education services: speech, resource (including itinerant support), behavior improvement, and preprimary child development.

Speech services

The speech therapist described her role as helping students to be able to communicate effectively, so that they can be successful academically. To this end, she collaborates with many people from the moment she first receives the referral information. She talks with the teachers, parents, and any other specialists involved with the student's education program, such as occupational or physical therapists, in developing and implementing the student's IEP.

Speech services are provided at regularly scheduled times during the two-and-a-half days per week the speech therapist is at Baskin, but the setting, intensity, and strategies used are determined entirely by the needs of each student. Some services are provided in small groups, some one-on-one, and some in the special education or regular education classroom. One parent noted the change she saw in her daughter when the teacher used a small-group arrangement to address her needs:

> At first . . . I didn't really want her in the program because I didn't see how she would benefit from just [being] with a small group of children. I wanted her to be with other groups—a larger group. But it was quite the opposite. She developed really well. We see how she's improving her language. It's been good for us.

The speech therapist monitors student achievement regularly, and when a student isn't making progress as anticipated, she alters the strategies she is using with the student. If the student still isn't making appropriate progress, she then talks with the parents and teachers, or calls a brief ARD meeting to discuss other possible ways to help the student to succeed. Teachers have found that working with the speech therapist to incorporate speech goals in the regular and special education classrooms has helped students achieve academically. This year, for example, four students receiving speech services have exited from the special education program following dramatic academic achievement and mastery of goals and objectives on their IEPs.

Resource and itinerant support services

The resource services provided at Baskin include pull-out classes for reading, language arts, and mathematics. Instruction in these classes is driven by each student's IEP. The resource teacher maintains routine communication with the students' regular education teachers to ensure curriculum alignment, and supports areas in which students are experiencing difficulty or frustration in the regular education classroom. The teachers see this communication as essential to maintaining appropriate instructional goals, objectives, and modifications, and to monitoring student progress.

The resource teacher also provides itinerant support in the regular education classrooms. The design of this service was developed through a needs assessment. Teachers recognized that Content Mastery[17] wasn't serving the needs of students. A special education teacher explained, "It's hard for them to come to us. So we said, 'Well, we will come to you.'" Teachers then worked to figure out how to ensure this service would meet the needs of students. Another special education teacher shared:

> What we did is [look] at each grade level and decided what they needed. If it was language arts, then we try to schedule our time to be in their room during the language arts block. If a grade level had a need for math, then we try to schedule some [time with] math classes.

With this support, the classroom teacher delivers instruction to the entire class while the itinerant teacher walks around the room monitoring students. After the lesson, the itinerant teacher helps any student who appears to be having difficulty. She explained:

> We're just . . . monitoring. We're trying not to single out the special education students. Then once [the regular education teacher] finishes her direct teach and starts with the demonstrations and independent work, we will help the students. We will not only help [students receiving special education services]; we will help any student that needs help. We just sort of walk around and observe, and if we see that a student is

[17] Content Mastery was a flexible program provided in previous school years at Baskin that allowed students with disabilities the opportunity to meet with the special education teacher in the resource room for additional support when needed, following instruction provided by the regular education teacher.

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> having a problem, or a group—because we do a lot of group work in the classroom—we'll just quietly help them with whatever problem they're having. And we have a schedule. We stay for the allotted time and then we leave.

Some teachers expressed concern about the limitations of this arrangement, including the limited time the itinerant teacher can be in the regular education classroom to provide support. If students need support at other times, for instance, there is no extra support. This is one issue being addressed at grade-level meetings. Most teachers expressed positive views of the itinerant services, and the regular and special education teachers shared how well this model is working, as students are able to receive instruction in the regular education classroom with appropriate support. The resource teacher is then able to reinforce these lessons and specific skills in the resource room.

Behavior Improvement Program services

The Behavior Improvement Program (BIP) offers both pull-out and self-contained services focused on building student self-esteem and academic achievement. Placement in this class is determined by the ARD committee, based on the student's behavioral support needs. Teachers recognize that one effective support for students is the time students have with the BIP teacher every morning. No matter what classes students have with this teacher, all students in BIP meet first thing in the morning to discuss any issues or concerns that the students might have. During this time, students bring assignments from their regular education classes, and the teacher works to develop their understanding of concepts. She explained:

> Let's say that they're having problems with [math]. They will bring that assignment with them. We cover that first, and I go ahead and try to get an assignment for them at their level, so they'll be able to understand . . . whatever was given to them in the classroom, so they won't feel so lost. Once they understand it, they'll be able to accomplish even what the teacher is wanting them to do. They go back happy, because they understand what they're supposed to do.

While providing instruction that addresses the students' individual education programs, teachers make sure that this curriculum is aligned with that of the regular education classrooms. The BIP teacher explained, "The same curriculum that the regular classroom people are doing, they're doing in my class, so when it's time for them to go back in there, they're not all lost."

While the BIP teacher doesn't offer itinerant services like the resource teacher, she does visit classrooms, make observations, and share ideas with teachers to support students' behavioral needs in the regular education classroom. General education teachers appreciate this opportunity to get another perspective and input on additional strategies and accommodations to try.

Pre-Primary Child Development services

Pre-Primary Child Development (PPCD) is provided to three- and four-year-olds with disabilities who can benefit from classroom intervention. Teachers in this program maintain high expectations for all of the three- and four-year-olds in their classrooms. They design instruction to address each student's IEP, with attention to future demands of the regular education curriculum. One parent attributed her child's success to the high expectations of the program: "[The teacher's] demands are extremely high, which I've always been in favor of." Parents also recognize how much the teachers care about the whole child, noting how teachers instill in children the "desire to reach their own potential."

Teachers and parents recognize that communication with parents is important to the students' success. One parent explained how this communication was so beneficial:

> You know what I found most helpful, that when he first joined PPCD, there was a journal sent home of his daily activities—what was accomplished that day, what they were trying to accomplish that day—which helped me as a parent go home and continue that activity. That was very, very helpful.

Another parent added, "She would always let me know what they were doing, and what we need to work on at the house, because she only saw him . . . twice a week for 30 minutes a day." Parents recognized how the communication was effective both ways. As one parent shared,

> If they mentioned [in their daily notes home that] they were trying to work on behavior, it gave me as a parent the opportunity to come back and say, "Well, you know we do this at home. Maybe this might be more helpful." So the communication there was very, very good.

Special education services for students with limited proficiency in English

Because of the small number of students identified as having limited proficiency in English at Baskin, the district provides transportation and services for students who need instruction and support in their native language at a nearby school. If any of these

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students were identified as needing special education services, he or she would continue to be served at this neighboring school so that the native language could be used for instruction.

The district faces the same difficulty as all districts across the state and nation: hiring special education teachers who are also certified to teach bilingual education. They actively search for these teachers, and place them in schools where the need is greatest. In the event that a bilingual-certified special education teacher is not available, the district employs a bilingual teaching assistant to provide services—under the supervision of the special education teacher—to students in special education with limited proficiency in English. In addition to this assistance, the bilingual education teacher and the special education teacher are expected to work very closely together. These two teachers share responsibility for the achievement of the student, meeting regularly to review progress and plan instruction. They both serve on the ARD committee that develops the individual education program for the student and closely monitors the student's progress.

If a student is served at a neighboring school, the principal of the receiving school serves on both the ARD committee and the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee,[18] which monitors the student progress on the IEP. This committee also monitors students who have been exited from the bilingual program for an additional two years. This frequent and prolonged monitoring of students with limited proficiency in English serves to ensure that they are achieving their IEP goals, achieving success in the bilingual education program, and ultimately are proficient in English. The receiving school provides students who are served in bilingual education or special education any other special services available on their campus that will ensure the students' success in the regular education program. Unless their disabilities are severe, students in special education with limited proficiency in English will spend the majority of their school day in the bilingual education program.

Ensuring Effectiveness of Services

The teachers at Baskin take advantage of their strengths in communication and collaboration to ensure effectiveness of the special education services provided by the school. Teachers see collaboration as a key to supporting student success, and they recognize that their ability to communicate and share expertise is essential to student achievement. They did note, however, that finding time to meet was difficult. They agree that it is essential to find time when students are involved in other activities (such as physical education, music, or art) to make sure they're all "on the same page" when it comes to providing quality services to students. Collaboration, however, is not always easy. Teachers expressed that making sure all students learn is a difficult goal. Parents recognize this. As one parent noted, "I see extreme caring and motivation. That has to come from the leadership of the school. The teachers that work here are much more motivated than a lot of people that I've seen."

As part of their collaborative efforts to ensure effectiveness of services, Baskin teachers work to align the curriculum taught to students in both regular education and special education programs. They also work closely with parents so that any work parents do at home also supports the curriculum. To maintain and improve their skills, the teachers at Baskin regularly engage in professional development workshops and seek out opportunities to learn from and to teach each other.

Alignment

Special and regular education teachers work together to maintain high standards and provide quality curriculum to all students with disabilities. The principal noted, "There is a good alignment between special education and regular education in terms of successful practices and what we've learned about reading. So it's not two different programs." For example, all teachers use the Balanced Literacy model, so students with disabilities receive the same reading instruction in the resource and regular education classrooms. This alignment of curriculum is apparent throughout the school, including in special areas such as physical education, music, and art. One teacher shared:

> I think what it is [that supports student success] in our school is that we're all on the same page; we all speak the same language, and we're not saying "the special ed students," or "the Title I students" or "the 504 students," or "the dyslexic students." They're all Baskin students. We all speak the same language when we try to prepare them in their academics as well as their community life.

Teachers noted how important this alignment is to student success, especially when students receive services from more than one program (such as speech and resource). Teachers of these students plan

[18] The Texas Education Code requires each school district to establish a Language Proficiency Assessment Committee composed of a professional bilingual educator, a transitional language educator, a parent of a student with limited proficiency in English, and a campus administrator. The committee must recommend the most appropriate placement and monitor the progress of students with limited proficiency in English.

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together to create uniformity of instruction and strategies used. One teacher noted, "We really try to work closely. We try and work together as a group on IEP [goals] and objectives because if every person is doing something different, it makes [progress for students] difficult."

Teachers see inclusion[19] as a successful result of this alignment. Teachers continue to modify lessons according to individual needs of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom, but agreed that "basically everyone does everything." In other words, students with disabilities are provided the same content and held to the same high expectations as regular education students. Parents also see inclusion as a success. One parent related her experience working with the teacher regarding her son, who was receiving services to support his physical disability:

> He started in December [and] by January, the teacher had requested to have him all day, because he was only coming half day. The reason [she gave me] for that was to get him accustomed to his surroundings, to be able to maneuver his [wheelchair] more. That helped him feel more part of Baskin. He was very aware of "I am the odd one." So, being more involved with the kids, I see him now and he's just one of the kids. He gets in trouble like anybody else. And he's aware of that. There's no free rides in his case. He's dealt with like anybody else, which has been great for him.

Parents also provide support to students and teachers. Teachers recognize the importance of providing parents information regarding what's happening at school, so they can help reinforce skills and goals at home. In turn, parents provide teachers with strategies that are effective at home. Parents are provided student progress information at least weekly, either by written communication or informal meetings when parents bring or pick up students. In addition, progress reports are sent to parents every nine weeks, which includes a current evaluation of student performance on IEP goals and objectives. Parents shared how they appreciate this routine communication, and how they feel comfortable initiating communication because the teachers are so responsive: "Things get done. When you ask the teacher or have concerns, you get results."

Building teacher capacity

When students aren't making anticipated progress, teachers are quick to try new things, such as different strategies or accommodations. One teacher explained that "the main things [to] try are different strategies, not to just keep going on and using the same thing, because obviously it's not working." Changes in classroom arrangement and grouping within the classroom, for instance, have been used to support student success. In addition, teachers have worked extensively with the physical education staff to provide students opportunities to develop skills through work as "assistants."

Teachers maintain high expectations for themselves as instructional leaders. They also recognize the importance of increasing their own knowledge and skills in order to appropriately and adequately address the needs of all students. They are comfortable asking questions and asking for assistance. The district special education supervisor noted, "We have people who work here . . . they're asking a lot of questions about what they can do to make things better for students." She added, "By asking questions and finding out how to do things better, they constantly are improving [their teaching and student performance outcomes]." As a result of their requests for more information, the district special education supervisor plans to provide additional training to Baskin staff on specific areas of need identified by the teachers, specifically information on working with children who display characteristics of ADHD (attention-deficit hyperactive disorder). This ongoing communication and support between teachers and the district is facilitated by the supervisor's routine visits to the campus, approximately two to three hours per week.

Teachers are also utilizing in-house professional development opportunities. The special education teachers, for instance, have provided in-service workshops to regular education teachers on strategies for working with students with disabilities, specifically for students with learning disabilities, ADD (attention-deficit disorder), and/or ADHD.

Ensuring Appropriateness of Services

The staff views special education as a support system rather than a placement. Student progress and instructional arrangement are monitored daily to make sure services are meeting the needs of students. In the upper grades, the principal reviews weekly assessments (small quizzes students are given in reading and mathematics that cover skills they're learning) created by the instructional guide. In addition, the counselor checks progress reports sent to parents each grading period. If there are any failure notices for students with disabilities, she reviews them with the principal, talks with the classroom teachers to see which modifications aren't working and what else could be tried, and talks with the parents to

[19] Inclusion refers to a service plan that allows students with disabilities to receive all or part of their instruction in a regular education setting, regardless of handicapping condition or severity.

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ensure that the student's emotional needs as well as academic needs are being met. She will also call an ARD, if necessary, so that changes (in goals and objectives, modifications, or setting) can be made to the student's IEP, if deemed appropriate by the ARD committee. Teachers use this information to identify specific skills that need to be re-taught. In these ways, students are provided every opportunity to achieve success.

As students demonstrate progress throughout the year, ARD committees may meet in addition to the required annual meeting. The committee will use this time to ensure the IEP is appropriate. For example, if an ARD committee holds an annual meeting at the beginning of the year and determines that the student should be exempt from the TAAS, the committee can meet again at a later date to review student progress and determine that the student should not be exempt from one or all of the assessments, with or without specific modifications. The principal explained that "just because someone has been exempt, we don't say we're not going to worry about them, because our job is to get them up [to grade level]." The entire collaborative ARD committee is well-versed on the state guidelines for identifying students as eligible or ineligible to take the TAAS, which makes exempting or not exempting students from the TAAS an easy decision.

Teachers recognize the need for continued monitoring of student progress. For instance, one teacher expressed the importance of continued support once students begin to overcome difficulties:

> **Our goal is to provide the intervention that's necessary so that the special education student makes gains, number one. The ultimate goal is to provide enough of a support system that, not only do they make gains, but if we can provide them with those strategies and interventions that are going to get them to grade level, and keep that support going—even though they are at grade level—we're going to keep that support going because we know that once you get it, you have to practice it to really internalize it.**

Canterbury Elementary School

Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District
Edinburg, Texas

1998–1999 School Year

Student Enrollment	581
Attendance Rate	97.9%
Grades Served	EE–5

Demographics

African American	0.5%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.4%
Hispanic	85.7%
Native American	0.3%
White	12.0%
Limited English Proficiency	10.7%
Mobility	8.1%
Low Income (Free or Reduced-Price Lunch)	53.4%
Special Education Enrollment	4.8%

Performance

1998–1999 Texas Accountability Rating	Exemplary
1999–2000 Texas Accountability Rating	Exemplary

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Canterbury Elementary School

Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District
Edinburg, Texas

School Background

Canterbury Elementary School is in the Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas. The student population served by Edinburg CISD is 95.8 percent Hispanic, and 83.4 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Canterbury is located in a quiet residential area of Edinburg, surrounded by subdivisions recently carved out of former farmland. The attendance area of the school is diverse. It includes an affluent area, a trailer park, and some colonias.[20] Parents of students at the school work at a wide range of jobs—some are doctors and lawyers, some are migrant farm workers, and some go over the border to Reynosa, Mexico, to work in the *maquiladoras*.[21] Canterbury's campus is warm and inviting to parents and students alike. Large windows topped with colorful curtains line the broad hallways, where benches and plants invite visitors and students to linger and converse quietly. Adorned with student artwork, these hallways lead to classrooms as bright with learning as with color.

Population Served

Canterbury serves 581 students, of whom 85.7 percent are Latino, and 53.4 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Students with limited proficiency in English comprise 10.7 percent of the school population. In 1998–99, 4.8 percent of the school population was being served in special education. At the time of our visit in spring 2000, the school was also serving nine three- and four-year-old students in a district Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities, which is located on the campus. All of these students were from outside of the school's attendance area. In addition, special education personnel were providing services to 14 students with disabilities in kindergarten through grade 5. Of these 23 students, 12 were girls and 11 were boys. Though there have been few changes in the school's demographics, special education enrollment at Canterbury has decreased over the past three years.

Table 9: Canterbury Special Education Enrollment[22]

1997–1998		1998–1999		1999–2000	
School	**State**	**School**	**State**	**School**	**State**
6.5%	12.0%	4.8%	12.1%	4.3%	12.1%

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

Special Features and Programs

The school opened in 1989 to serve as a magnet school for gifted and talented (GT) students bussed from all over the Edinburg school district. In 1992, the district added 18 classrooms and Canterbury became a neighborhood school, now also serving students living in the immediate area.[23] During the 1998–99 school year, 54.9 percent of the students at Canterbury were identified as GT. Despite Canterbury's reputation as a GT school, the majority of the students are from the school's attendance area. Approximately 262 of the regular education and 120 of the GT students at Canterbury live in the school's attendance area. The GT students are concentrated in grades 2 through 5. Because of the low numbers of bilingual students in kindergarten through grade 5, students with limited English proficiency are assigned to regular education classrooms taught by teachers who are certified to teach bilingual education. Canterbury has also implemented the School-wide Enrichment Model and an early childhood special education classroom which serves children from across the district.

20 Colonias are unincorporated areas lacking most municipal services, such as sewer and water connections, and paved streets. Residents usually buy lots with monthly payments and build their own homes on site, expanding the homes as they have the funds to do so.

21 *Maquiladoras* are assembly plants, usually owned by American companies and located in Mexico.

22 These figures are drawn from the Texas Education Agency's AEIS website (www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis) and represent the enrollment reported to TEA as of the last Friday in October of each school year.

23 In fall 2000 the district opened two more GT magnet schools. Approximately 100 GT students who would have attended Canterbury now attend one of the other magnet schools and approximately 40 more neighborhood students are enrolled in the regular education program.

Academic Performance

Canterbury has achieved an impressive record of academic success as measured by the Texas accountability system.[24] For the past four years, the school has received the state's highest rating of Exemplary. To receive an Exemplary rating, an elementary school must have at least a 94 percent attendance rate and more than 90 percent of their students (and of each subgroup of students) passing the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS).[25] For the past four years, Canterbury students have consistently performed at these high levels on the TAAS reading, writing, and mathematics subtests.

Table 10: Canterbury Students Passing TAAS*

	1997–1998[26]		1998–1999[27]		1999–2000	
	School	State	School	State	School	State
TAAS Reading	97.6%	87.0%	96.4%	86.5%	98.6%	87.4%
TAAS Writing	96.4%	87.4%	99.2%	88.2%	96.9%	88.2%
TAAS Mathematics	95.0%	84.2%	97.3%	85.7%	96.5%	87.4%

* Includes all students who participated, including students with disabilities.

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

Historically, almost all of Canterbury's students have participated in the TAAS. For several years, the school's special education exemption rates have been well below the state average, and in 2000, *none* of the students with disabilities were exempted from all portions of the TAAS.[28] The students in special education programs had achievement on the tests that was near the state average.

Table 11: Canterbury Special Education Students' Performance and Participation on the TAAS

	1997–1998		1998–1999		1999–2000	
	School	State	School	State	School	State
Performance (% Passing)						
TAAS Reading	77.8%	51.1%	*[29]	66.6%	*	71.0%
TAAS Writing	*	46.0%	*	62.7%	*	65.6%
TAAS Mathematics	36.4%	46.7%	66.7%	64.6%	66.7%	71.1%
Participation (% Exempt)[30]	.3%	5.2%	.3%	6.9%	0.0%	7.1%

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

In addition to its outstanding performance on the state assessments, Canterbury Elementary School has received several state and national honors, including Nationally Recognized Title I Distinguished School, 1998–99 and Title I Distinguished School, 1997–98 and 1998–99. Canterbury was also designated a Four Star School by *Texas Monthly* magazine in 1997.

Getting All Students to Achieve High Levels of Success

One might assume that administrators and staff at a school with a high percentage of gifted and talented students would focus their energies on these students, to the exclusion of students in the regular education and special education programs. However, this is not the case at Canterbury Elementary School. In fact, the administrators and teachers at Canterbury are

24 The accountability system rates elementary schools according to their attendance rates and their student performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The four levels of ratings for schools are Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, and Low-Performing.

25 The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is a criterion-referenced test given to students in grades 3 through 8 and grade 10. The test is administered during the spring semester of each school year. In elementary schools, the test measures student achievement in reading and mathematics (for grades 3, 5, and 6) and in reading, writing, and mathematics (for grade 4). Students with disabilities may be exempted from taking the test by a school's Admission, Review, and Dismissal committee, which determines the individual education plan for each student in special education. For more information see the glossary in Appendix A. (Source: Texas Education Agency's AEIS Glossary, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis)

26 Unadjusted scores as reported by the Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System in 1998 and used for school accountability rating purposes. (Source: www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/98/index.html)

27 Beginning in 1999, results also include special education test takers and Spanish-speaking test takers in grades 3 and 4 on the reading and mathematics portions of the TAAS.

28 According to the Texas Education Agency's AEIS website, although it is the intention to test every student in these grades, there are circumstances under which some students are exempted from the test. Students receiving special education services, for example, may receive an ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal) exemption for every test; and students may receive an LEP (Limited English Proficient) exemption for every test. (Source: www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis)

29 An asterisk (*) indicates that fewer than five students were in the classification.

30 The percentage exempt, as reported by the AEIS, indicates the percentage of students classified as exempt on all three exams.

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dedicated to ensuring the academic success of every student in the school. Principal Nellie Cantu explained:

> **A lot of the kids that are coming in for the GT program are special populations. We've got lots of colonias, a lot of high poverty area children, and we could use that as an excuse. We could say, "You know, these kids are not going to be achieving. They're not going to be successful." We won't. We will not ever say that. . . . The day that I start seeing or thinking that way, I will leave education. I could not live with myself if [only] one population was doing well. All the populations are doing well here.**

Canterbury's low TAAS exemption rate for students with disabilities is a reflection of this philosophy. The staff at Canterbury feel that every student, including students with disabilities, can demonstrate success on the state achievement test. Even knowing that the scores of all students who take the test will be included in their school's overall performance rating, the staff at Canterbury have made an effort to include students with disabilities in the exam.

Beginning in the 1998–99 school year, the state of Texas required that the scores of special education students who take the TAAS be counted in determining school ratings. The implementation of this new regulation was the probable cause of a statewide increase in the percentage of special education students exempted from the TAAS, from 5.2 percent in 1998 to 6.9 percent in 1999. However, this was not the case at Canterbury. In fact, the exemption rate for special education students at Canterbury remained at a low .3 percent in 1999, while the school still achieved the Exemplary rating by having more than 90 percent of all students pass the TAAS. In 2000, the school again achieved an Exemplary rating and *none of the students with disabilities were exempted from all of the tests.*

Making Sure Students Learn

To ensure the academic success of all students, administrators and teachers at Canterbury have made a conscious effort to bring to students the types of creative and challenging instruction and programs expected of a gifted and talented magnet school. They provide children with opportunities to explore areas of personal strength and interest and set high expectations for student performance. Teachers of the GT, regular education, and special education classrooms work together in grade-level teams to plan instruction and share strategies. The staff at Canterbury also recognize that all students, including students in the GT program, experience academic difficulties at one time or another. To identify learning problems quickly, school and district administrators monitor student achievement data and use this data to guide programmatic and instructional decisionmaking.

Building on student talents and interests

Canterbury's staff believe that their approach to building on student interests is critical to student performance. One grade-level leader noted that extracurricular and enrichment activities are important to kids because they get to choose what they want to do. Through these programs and activities, students become excited about and engaged in their own learning. According to the principal, student participation in extracurricular and enrichment activities has also helped the school maintain discipline and a high attendance rate. She explained:

> **We inform [students] Day 1. "This is for you. We want you to participate. Your attendance must be kept up. You cannot be out two days and then come in and expect you're going to contest." It's not going to happen. The academics will always come first.**

Canterbury offers a variety of activities that allow students to identify and pursue their own talents and interests. Among these activities are the School-wide Enrichment Model (SEM) and widely popular after-school activities such as Chess Club and University Interscholastic League. But the school's commitment to building on the talents and interests of all students is not limited to special programs and clubs. Administrators and teachers also try to infuse this approach to education into the classroom and daily life at the school.

One of the most visible enrichment programs on campus is the SEM. On Wednesdays, the entire campus breaks from the regular routine and participates in SEM. Every six weeks, the staff at Canterbury survey students about what they would like to learn through SEM. The administration then assigns students to one of their top three SEM choices. Students have chosen subjects as wide-ranging as drag racing, horses, camping, fashion design, traditional dances of the Texas border, puppetry, and cartooning. For SEM, students are clustered across grade levels and programs, so bilingual, GT, special education, and regular education students participate together. Teachers, administrators, and staff at the school, as well as volunteers from the community, are recruited to serve as leaders of these activities.

At Canterbury, SEM is not used as a way to schedule extra time for tutoring or other remedial activities, but as an opportunity for students to explore their own interests and enjoy learning. It also allows staff at the school to demonstrate their own excitement about learning as they explore interesting activities with students.

In addition to SEM, Canterbury offers a large number of widely attended extracurricular activities and clubs. All of the students at Canterbury participate in at least one of these activities. One of the most popular activities is Chess Club. Chess Club was started in response to the request of three students, one of whom receives special education services at the school. The students approached the principal with the idea, and she found a teacher aide who was willing to sponsor the group. By the end of the first year, approximately 50 students were playing chess, and after three years, approximately one-third of the school's students participate. Students come to school early or stay after school in order to play chess and teach each other the game. Administrators and teachers enthusiastically support the students in playing chess because it provides opportunities to develop critical thinking skills and to analyze and solve problems.

According to the principal, these activities have helped unite students at the school. She stated:

> Chess is open to all children. We've got migrant kids playing, we've got bilingual kids, we've got special education, we've got gifted children, we've got the low-level readers. It's a very difficult game, and yet these kids can do it. It's really united [us] because the kids mesh and they come together and they play together and it's not "Well, I'm GT" or "I'm bilingual," it's just "We're Canterbury."

For those who wish to compete in chess, a competitive division has been formed. They hold their own chess tournaments, and the winners then go on to compete in monthly chess tournaments in the area. Last year, Canterbury had 16 students qualify to compete at a national tournament, including students receiving instruction through the school's regular and special education programs. Students must have passing grades to participate in chess competitions, and teachers provide students the support they need to keep their grades up so they can compete in chess.

The extracurricular offerings on campus are always evolving. In fall 1999, for example, a teacher asked to start University Interscholastic League (UIL) activities at Canterbury. Now almost half of the staff works with UIL, and the students compete regularly and successfully. This year, for example, a migrant student, who enters school late and leaves early each year to work, placed first in the Valley schools Number Sense competition. As with all of the activities, a cross-section of students in all programs participates. A third-grade teacher and coach of UIL explained that this includes students receiving special education services:

> I have two of my [special education] resource students that are in UIL. They're in Oral Reading. The poems they get, of course, are easier for them, but they're expected to perform just as well because they're competing with schools in different areas. And they have no sense of "Well, I'm in special ed. I can't do that." I'll ask them, "Do you want to join it? Whoever wants to join can join." It's that type of atmosphere that they just feel real comfortable with me and they feel part of everything.

In addition to these special activities and clubs, administrators and teachers at Canterbury try to find ways to build on student interests and talents in the classroom. Many of the teachers are trained in GT education, which supports building on the strengths of students and accelerating learning in the area of each individual student's strengths.[31] With approximately half of the teachers at Canterbury teaching GT classes (48.9 percent in 1999, and 53.8 percent in 2000), a culture of addressing students as individuals with strengths predominates.

Teachers provide a variety of learning activities in the classroom, allowing students many ways to gain understanding and demonstrate their knowledge. The classroom walls are covered with evidence of this approach, including student poetry, stories, and artwork. Students are provided with multiple opportunities to participate in activities and contests that build on the curriculum. These include activities such as the schoolwide science fair, and competitions such as Rising Star (a statewide contest in narrative writing, poetry, and art).

Collaboration across diverse programs

According to administrators, teachers, and support personnel, one of the factors that contributes to Canterbury's schoolwide success and Exemplary status is the amount of collaboration that takes place among teachers. At each grade level, teachers in the GT and regular education program get together to work on lesson plans, identify resources, and share strategies that work. One fourth-grade teacher explained,

> We work together on lesson plans and share lesson plans. We share what we do in GT with the regular [education] classroom. [The regular education teacher] picks and chooses [what she wants to use] and then she also shares with us—sometimes she has things going on and we're like, "Ooh, that's great. Our kids would like this."

[31] Texas Education Code §89.3 provides an array of options that must be provided to GT students, including opportunities to accelerate learning in a student's area of strength.

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The special education teacher attends these grade-level meetings to ensure that student work in the special education classroom is coordinated with daily classroom activities and to provide her expertise and assistance to all of the teachers.

Collaboration across programs, however, has not always existed on campus. When Nellie Cantu was hired as principal of Canterbury in 1996, she found that teachers were not meeting and working together. The GT teachers were meeting separately from the regular education and the bilingual education teachers. She instituted grade-level meetings where all teachers, including those in GT, regular, and special education, come together to plan, analyze data, and share instructional strategies. This move provided the opportunity for teachers to support each other and recognize expertise and leadership among themselves. Principal Cantu related,

> When I came in I saw that there was planning going on but it was GT, and then we had the other teachers. I thought, "Wait a minute, what is happening? We're about Canterbury. It's not about a group or a population, it's about a campus." I introduced the idea, "Let's plan together," and I scheduled planning times, designated planning times. All grade levels were going to meet. I helped them understand that my bilingual teachers have very good expertise that can be shared with everyone. That the GT teachers have great strategies that can be shared. . . . Basically, we helped each other out and this campus became Exemplary.

Ms. Cantu went on to explain how these grade-level meetings have provided opportunities for all teachers to share their particular expertise, as well as provide ideas and tips to each other on ways to improve their classroom instruction.

Close monitoring of student progress

At each grade level, the teachers and administrators have clear and measurable expectations for student performance. In the third through fifth grades, for example, they expect their students to master the content set forth in the state curriculum standards, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and the objectives assessed on the TAAS. For GT teachers, the goal is academic recognition (mastering all objectives) on TAAS. General education classroom teachers also share high expectations. As one such teacher explained, "I push them just as much and they are expected to be up there, just as every other student in the school." To make sure that students meet these expectations, administrators and teachers at the school closely monitor student progress.

Administrators at both the district and the school play a leadership role in the ongoing gathering, analysis, and use of student achievement data. The district has developed benchmark tests in reading, mathematics, and writing that are administered every six weeks. It makes results of these tests available to the schools quickly, so that instruction can address the specific academic needs of each student. Principal Cantu and the school's curriculum assistant maintain complete records of the progress of every student enrolled at Canterbury. They use data from the district benchmark tests, printouts from the computer lab (which are compiled regularly by the computer lab teacher), and student achievement on Accelerated Reader[32] tests to monitor the progress of each student. The principal and the curriculum assistant analyze the data by student, by teacher, and by grade level.

If any student is failing to make expected progress, the principal and the curriculum assistant meet with the teachers involved, either individually or in grade-level teams, to determine what is being done to address the problem and to offer assistance to teachers in bringing students to mastery. For example, the curriculum assistant searches for additional curriculum materials, models lessons, and identifies appropriate professional development activities. The principal makes sure that all of the teachers know they have her support. She conducts daily visits to each classroom and gets teachers the material resources they need for instruction. She also holds meetings for staff members who do not attend the grade-level meetings, such as the librarian and the counselor. At these meetings, she enlists their help with objectives that need strengthening, such as summarization.

Addressing Barriers to Student Learning

At Canterbury, the GT and regular education teachers address most barriers to student learning. If a student experiences difficulty in class, the classroom teacher uses the data compiled by the district and the administrators to identify the objectives the student is not mastering and addresses them, either in the classroom or through special tutoring and support programs. In the early grades (prekindergarten–first), the teacher's efforts are enhanced by reading intervention supported by the district. Should the classroom teacher's and the district's intervention efforts fail, Canterbury has set in place a system to help

[32] Accelerated Reader is a program in which students earn points for their achievement on computer tests taken after reading books identified at their reading level.

teachers explore other ways of helping their students succeed in the regular education classroom.

The central role of the classroom teacher

The teachers at Canterbury feel responsible for the academic performance of students in their classrooms. Consequently, when a student is experiencing difficulty with particular objectives, the teachers tend not to blame the student, but rather to look at their own practice to determine what they can do to ensure that each student is successful. They look at ways to modify their instruction to meet the needs of the student; target the objectives through one-on-one tutoring and support programs; consult with other teachers and administrators on how to best reach the student; and actively engage parents in activities that complement what happens in the classroom. "We're accountable," noted one classroom teacher. And because of this, the teachers at Canterbury employ a number of strategies to bring a child up to grade level.

A third-grade teacher, for example, found that one of her students did not have some very basic grade-level skills. The student had attended first grade at another school and had not learned simple addition or subtraction. She could not even tell the teacher which number was greater, 40 or 16. "Because of that, we've gone back to basics," the teacher related. She went on to explain:

> We use everything, like hands-on manipulatives. We're using base-10 blocks and stuff like that. We're tutoring. I do one-on-one with her. I've also approached [the principal] and we've talked about strategies we can do. . . . Her parents and I have really worked together with her and [the student] also is involved with the planning. I'll ask her, "What do you think we should do? What will work for you?" She'll tell me, "If we stay after school and if you do this and you help me with that." It's a lot of communication between the student and the teacher and the parents.

At Canterbury, classroom teachers often go to each other and to campus administrators for ideas about how to help students who are experiencing difficulty. With encouragement from administrators, teachers also turn to the school's special education teacher for strategies and advice. A fifth-grade teacher, for instance, went to the special education teacher to discuss a student who was not mastering some objectives in class. The classroom teacher described how the advice that she received helped bring the student up to grade level and also helped avoid an inappropriate referral for special education testing: "[Now] she can more or less keep up with everyone else. . . . If I would have referred her before, it would have been a mistake."

When a student experiences difficulty or has fallen behind in class, teachers also look to parents for information and support. They explain to parents the specific objectives that their child needs to work on and pull together special materials that parents can use at home. "We call the parents and say, 'Your son or daughter is staying behind. Please help us out,'" explained one preschool teacher. "I even laminated the Spell and Read charts where they can point to the letters and to the pictures, so that parents can take them home." In addition to enlisting parents' support with classroom objectives, teachers also talk with parents to find out if there are circumstances in the student's life that might be affecting academic performance. If this is the case, teachers often approach the principal and counselor for support.

Responding to difficulties in the early years

While concerned with identifying and responding to learning difficulties at all grade levels, staff at the district and the school have placed special emphasis on addressing barriers to learning to read in the early years—prekindergarten to first grade.

In the first grade, for example, teachers look at student scores on the Texas Primary Reading Inventory[33] and observe student performance in the classroom. Students who have difficulty mastering the curriculum are placed in a district-sponsored program entitled the Early Success Program for English-speaking students, or Pan y Canella for Spanish-speaking students. Patterned after Reading Recovery,[34] the program provides the additional assistance some students need to become fluent readers. Every afternoon for 45 minutes, one of the first-grade teachers provides intensive, small-group instruction to the students. At the time of our visit, nine first-grade students were receiving this extra support.

"That's just from the district," one teacher explained. The school staff also provide additional support. The teacher went on to note,

> We modify spelling lists or vocabulary lists according to the needs of the student. . . . they're not doing well, I, of course, get parents to help me out. I send materials

[33] The Texas Primary Reading Inventory is a diagnostic reading instrument for use with kindergarten and first-grade students.

[34] Reading Recovery is an early intervention program designed by Marie M. Clay to assist children in first grade who have difficulty learning to read and write.

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> home. I modify lists so they are successful. Let's start them out where they will be successful and then build from there.

Canterbury staff also work hard to ensure that students are better prepared *before* the first grade. About three years before our visit, teachers at the school expressed a concern that the students were not gaining the early pre-reading skills that they needed. At their request, the administration purchased an early reading program that the teachers believed would meet the needs of their students. The prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers implemented the program. One prekindergarten teacher noted that the program has made a big difference in student performance. "They're reading," she said. "Yes, we have the ones that are struggling, but we're working as a team with a program that we believe in. Scores are high." Based on Canterbury's success with this program, the district now provides it to all kindergarten and first-grade classes in the district.

A system for exploring additional options

In the 1999–2000 school year, the district required every school in the district to implement a Student Staff Assistant Team (SSAT) to help teachers address student learning problems. Since joining Canterbury four years before our visit, Principal Cantu had stood by her belief that special education was the placement of last resort. She had expected teachers to do whatever was necessary to meet the needs of students in the regular education classroom, and she had required detailed documentation of these efforts. Moreover, she and the school's curriculum assistant had helped teachers identify additional instructional strategies that might help students master the curriculum. Therefore, the district's new SSAT procedures were not entirely new to Canterbury's staff. One Canterbury SSAT member clarified:

> When we were handed the SSAT instrument—a lot of the stuff that's on there had been followed through all along, since our school had opened. I would always work with the teachers and say, "If you're going in with a referral or any kind of recommendation, you need to have documentation for the principal to show that you have already used up all the avenues of modifications that are needed for this child." Sure enough, they would come up against the principal and she would say, "Show me. Show me the documentation, show me what's being done." That helped a lot that the school was already in the mode. The school was already used to that process. They put a new name to it, but the school was already working through that.

When a student is not progressing as expected, classroom teachers can request SSAT assistance. To do this, they must complete a formal SSAT referral form, which they can get from the principal. Before completing a referral, though, the teachers at Canterbury try a number of strategies to help the student. One teacher noted,

> You do a lot before you even go to the principal. You've already talked to the parents . . . to the resource teacher, [and] tried those modifications, and it's not working. We don't rush into "Well, let's send them to special ed." No, because we want to give them a chance, and of course, we need to do everything we can before we put a label on the child.

At Canterbury, the membership of the SSAT varies based on the needs of the student. The principal, as chairperson of the team, determines the appropriate membership for each referral. The teacher who is asking for assistance, the curriculum assistant, and the computer lab teacher are always members of the team. The computer lab teacher is always included because she maintains the most current data on student achievement through the reports generated by the computer software. Other members might be the counselor, the school nurse, and the librarian, for example.

The SSAT looks at what has already been done for the student and often recommends that further modifications be tried, either in the classroom or outside of the classroom. According to the principal, the SSAT is charged with doing whatever it takes to ensure the student's success in the regular education classroom—including schedule changes. After the SSAT presents its recommendations to the teacher, the principal appoints a neutral person to observe and monitor progress for a minimum of 20 days. After the required 20 days, the team meets again to review the impact of their recommendations on the student's performance. Next steps may include continuation of the modifications, new or additional modifications for 20 more days, or, as a last resort, referral for special education testing.

The team takes care throughout the process to be sure that parents are aware of what is being done to help their child. A member of the SSAT explained:

> I don't think we've had any parent be surprised. No, because by then they've already known that there's intervention, that there's all these other things that have happened, so they know. I think they feel comfortable with the idea that we've exhausted everything, and they like that.

Identifying Students in Need of Special Education

Everyone at Canterbury, including the parents, has embraced the concept that the role of the special education program is to support students so they can be successful in the regular education classroom. This belief forms the basis for the referral, testing, and placement of students in need of special education services. Referrals may originate with any person involved in the student's education, including parents.

When the SSAT is satisfied that every possible intervention has been tried, and a student is still not progressing, a special education referral packet is provided for the teacher to complete. This completed packet then goes to the district for review to ensure that there is documentation that the requirements of special education have been met. When the district diagnostician and the director of special education have verified that there is sufficient documentation of need and of attempts to intervene, and the parents have given permission, then the diagnostic testing is done. The diagnostician always consults the student's permanent file to determine the student's language of instruction so that the appropriate tests can be administered. If there is any doubt, the diagnostician will administer the tests in both Spanish and English. In this way, the district ensures that language proficiency is not an underlying reason for a student's failure to progress as expected.[35]

When the diagnostician determines that the student does qualify for special education services, an Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD)[36] committee meeting is held to determine if special education services are appropriate. The principal chairs all ARD committee meetings and always tries to schedule the meetings so that the parents can attend. Sincere attempts are made to make parents feel comfortable—including conducting the meetings in Spanish, if that is the dominant language of the parents. Although the forms documenting the proceedings of the meeting are in English, an audio translation of the forms is provided for the parents to keep. One parent described her first ARD meeting:

> **At first I was nervous. I didn't know what to expect, but all they wanted was [to know] how they could help my daughter. They just wanted to help my daughter improve herself. It was okay. They were very nice. They just wanted to make me comfortable.**

When parents still have questions about placing their child in special education, the administrators and staff continue to work toward building trust. They ask parents to try the placement for six weeks, and invite parents to observe and evaluate for themselves the extra services that are being provided. According to staff at the school, parents usually see how the extra support is helping their child and agree to the placement. "Most of the cases that we've had like that," a member of the SSAT related, "come back in six weeks and say, 'You know what? It's helping. We appreciate you. Let's continue.'"

Ensuring the Success of Students with Disabilities

When the ARD committee determines that special education is the appropriate placement for a student, administrators and teachers continue the practices they use to ensure success for all students, with the additional support of the special education teacher and the district special education department. In fact, Canterbury administrators and teachers consider special education as additional support for students who need it, not as an alternative to regular education. The special education services are carefully tailored to build on student strengths and meet individual needs, with an eye to keeping students in the regular education classroom as much as possible and coordinating services to ensure success. This attitude was articulated by the special education teacher, who said,

> **The purpose of special education, and my goal, is to totally mainstream our students to fit right in to the mainstream where they wouldn't be dependent on anyone and they could have lifelong skills on their own.**

Just as they ensure that students with disabilities have access to the full array of academic services at the school, the administrators and teachers at Canterbury ensure that the students are integrated seamlessly into enrichment and extracurricular activities.

The goal of having students with disabilities fit into the mainstream of the school includes having them achieve the same high standards expected of all

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35 A language assessment scale is administered to every student in the Edinburg district, and a committee called the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) determines the language of instruction. Approximately 10 percent of the students at Canterbury are designated as having limited proficiency in English, more than 20 percent of the school staff are certified bilingual educators, and a majority of the teachers are bilingual.

36 The Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee is the group of teachers, administrators, parents, educational diagnosticians, and others who convene to discuss the needs of a student eligible for special services.

students at Canterbury. A fourth-grade teacher related one of the ways that she assures student success:

> **My expectations are very high, even if you are a special ed student. [Special education students] got to their goal in [the] Accelerated Reader. I pushed that last year. That helped tremendously. The more they read the better in reading they became.**

Range of Special Education Services

Canterbury's special education services support students from preschool to the fifth grade. Canterbury houses one of four Preschool Programs for Children with Disabilities (PPCD) for three- and four-year-old children in the district. Various individuals and agencies, including Child Find at the regional education service center, can refer children to the program. When possible, the district diagnostician tests children before they turn three years of age, so that qualifying students can begin receiving services on their third birthday.

Children in PPCD are closely monitored, and at four years of age, depending on the decisions of the ARD committee, can either remain in the PPCD program or go into a regular prekindergarten at their home campus. Those who require continued intensive services may be served in a district PPCD program for five-year-olds located at another campus. Upon entering first grade, students return to their home campus, where they continue to receive special education services if needed. This early intervention program often results in a successful transition into the regular education classroom. Nine students were enrolled in the PPCD program at Canterbury in the spring of 2000.

For students in kindergarten through fifth grade, the school offers a range of support services. The well-trained, experienced special education teacher, assisted by an aide who is also well trained, provide special education services in a variety of individual or small-group arrangements based on the specific needs of each student as determined by the ARD committee. Instruction is delivered in English or in Spanish, depending on the student's identified language of instruction. The special education teacher and the aide provide five levels of services:

- *Integrated* services, whereby the special education teacher takes responsibility for the core curriculum (language arts and mathematics) in the resource classroom and, if needed, the students are "shadowed" as they participate in regular education classroom activities such as music. That is, an aide provides the assistance that students need to be successful in school activities outside the special education classroom.
- *Resource* support, whereby students receive special education instruction in a subject, in addition to the instruction that they receive in the regular education classroom. This instruction is provided in the resource classroom and is coordinated to reinforce and complement what is being taught in the regular education classroom.
- *Content mastery assistance*, whereby the student can go to the special education classroom for individual assistance on assignments made by the regular education classroom teacher. Students drop in on an as-needed basis after receiving initial instruction in the classroom. The student, the regular education teacher, and the special education teacher jointly determine the need for content mastery assistance.
- *Consultation* services, whereby students with disabilities who reach grade-level achievement receive all instruction in the regular education classroom. The special education teacher consults with the classroom teacher at least once a week to ensure that the student continues to be successful. If the student begins to experience difficulty, he or she will immediately receive extra assistance from the special education teacher on an as-needed content mastery or resource basis.

Students can receive different levels of services in different subjects. For example, a fifth-grade student reading at second-grade level but performing near grade level in mathematics may receive *integrated* services in language arts and *content mastery* assistance in mathematics.

Students who receive special education services move from most restrictive services to least restrictive services as their achievement improves. For example, one student at Canterbury who started the special education program with *integrated* services for all core subjects is now receiving *resource* for language arts and *content mastery* for mathematics.

In all cases, the regular education classroom teachers routinely provide a variety of modifications and accommodations to instruction in the classroom for students with disabilities in accordance with the recommendations of the ARD committee. Researchers observed a teacher in one classroom providing extra assistance to a student with disabilities by asking pointed, direct questions about the mathematics problems they were working, by seating him where she could watch his work more closely, and by providing him more time to complete his work. None of these activities seemed to disrupt the flow of the classroom activities, and seemed to be part of the normal routine.

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Special education services for students with limited proficiency in English

Because of the relatively low number of students with limited proficiency in English at each grade level, Canterbury provides bilingual education services to students at each grade level in mixed classes of English- and Spanish-speaking students taught by a certified bilingual teacher in either regular education or GT education classrooms. These teachers participate in the ARD committee meetings where student individual education programs are developed and reviewed, and work closely with the special education teacher to monitor the progress of the students they both serve.

The campus administrators closely monitor the progress of all students, including those who are served by special education. Working with the bilingual education and the special education teachers, the administrators identify ways to provide additional support to students who are struggling. They might jointly determine that a student needs to be scheduled for more time in the computer lab, or be provided with more tutoring services by the regular/bilingual education teacher, or additional services in the special education classroom, where instruction may be provided in Spanish. In all cases, however, the intent is for the student to be successful in the regular/bilingual education classroom.

The district special education director relates that some of the accommodations or modifications they have found to be successful in working with students with limited English proficiency in special education are using differentiated instruction,[37] incorporating more visuals, assigning peer buddies to students, providing additional response time, modeling, and using English as a Second Language strategies. In addition, the regional education service center has a bilingual/special education task force that is working on specific issues relating to the students served in both programs. District and school personnel are regularly provided information by this task force.

Coordination Across Programs

In order to ensure that students with disabilities reach the school's high standards, the special education and regular education classroom teachers work together to support student achievement, demonstrating a sense of shared responsibility and mutual respect. The administrators and the GT, regular education, and special education teachers continually monitor the progress of students with disabilities on the campus. The district diagnostician and special education director meet regularly with the special education teacher and the school administrators to monitor student progress and determine the need for change. If a student with disabilities is not making expected progress, the response is always to address the problem as a team.

This collaboration across departments occurs both formally and informally. The special education teacher attends grade-level meetings and keeps abreast of schedules and units of instruction. General education teachers provide her with their lesson plans so that teaching in the special education classroom coordinates with that in the regular education classroom.

Informal communication also occurs regularly, with teachers updating each other on a student's progress, sharing successes and supporting each other when lessons are not so successful. This frequent communication contributes to a sense of closeness between teachers, but also toward the students they teach. A fourth-grade teacher explained:

> We feel like they are our own kids. I think that they feel good with that, whether it's the homeroom teacher or [the special education teacher] or wherever they go. They still feel that closeness from everyone. I think that has a lot to do with them wanting to continue to learn and try their best.

General education teachers at Canterbury were quick to praise the assistance provided by the special education teacher. They related how the achievement of students with disabilities had improved with the extra, concentrated assistance they received in the special education classroom. One teacher told of a student who came in from another school in the fifth grade who was reading at second-grade level. She said, "Once she started going to the resource room, I saw her improve. She did take the TAAS last year. She went from a 20 in reading to a 60 in reading. In math she did the same thing."

Perhaps most telling, however, is how this successful special education program has changed attitudes toward students with disabilities. One teacher described this change:

> Formerly I had an impression that if a student was [in] special education, that meant that [the student had] a low IQ or something. Now I don't think that anymore because I've come to understand that it's kids who need some help. It's not really an IQ thing. They can float in and out of [the need for special education assistance].

[37] In differentiated instruction, teachers use a variety of instructional approaches to modify content, process, and/or products in response to learner readiness, interest, and learning profiles of academically diverse students.

Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Every Aspect of the School

Students with disabilities participate in all the activities designed to build on student strengths and interests, including SEM and extracurricular activities. A fifth-grade teacher explained, "We want to try to make them feel that they belong and that they are just as capable and as smart as everyone else." Because the teachers at Canterbury are in the habit of looking for and building upon student strengths, they are quick to respond to special interests that students demonstrate. A teacher explained that this support of student interests also improves their performance in the classroom:

> **I, for example, have a special ed student, [and] he's an excellent, excellent chess player. He loves it. He just adores it. You would see him play and you would . . . never think that he has a learning disability because it's such a challenging game . . . [and] that adds to his self-confidence. . . . It plays a big role, I think, in the classroom.**

The administrators and teachers at Canterbury believe that students with disabilities should be included in assessments of academic achievement, including the TAAS, if appropriate. Just as the level of special education services provided to each student may vary by subject, the decision about whether a student in special education is ready to take the TAAS is made student by student, subject by subject. The teachers use practice tests and the district benchmark tests to determine each student's needs. They provide intense instruction in those areas where the student needs assistance, measuring and documenting progress.

As the date for TAAS administration nears, the teachers monitor each student's progress in each subject more carefully, so that they can be sure that every student who masters the curriculum in a subject is provided the opportunity to demonstrate that mastery on the TAAS. For students who are ready for the TAAS in only one subject, the school holds what they call a "brief ARD" to hear the teachers' recommendations, decide whether the student should take the TAAS in that subject, and decide what the testing modifications should be. In the 1999–2000 school year, some Canterbury special education students were exempted from the TAAS reading and writing subtests, but all students took the TAAS mathematics subtest, some with modifications.

Administrators and teachers at Canterbury explain that ensuring that all students achieve their high standards is not easy. They emphasize that it requires constant hard work and a clear focus on student achievement. A member of the SSAT explained how this clear focus on student achievement drives their actions: "We can't do things because it's easier. We can't make decisions based on [whether] it helps us or helps the school. The goal here is what helps the child."

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Loma Terrace Elementary School

Ysleta Independent School District
El Paso, Texas

1998–1999 School Year

Student Enrollment	987
Attendance Rate	97.5%
Grades Served	EE–6

Demographics

African American	0.9%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0%
Hispanic	96.0%
Native American	0%
White	3.0%
Limited English Proficiency	37.2%
Mobility	11.3%
Low Income (Free or Reduced-Price Lunch)	91.7%
Special Education Enrollment	10.4%

Performance

1998–1999 Texas Accountability Rating	Exemplary
1999–2000 Texas Accountability Rating	Exemplary

Loma Terrace Elementary School

Ysleta Independent School District
El Paso, Texas

School Background

Loma Terrace Elementary School is located in a working class neighborhood on the southeast side of El Paso, Texas, and just a few miles north of the Rio Grande River and Ciudad Juarez in Mexico. A dynamic border city with a population of over 600,000, El Paso is a major hub of international trade and industry. Loma Terrace is one of 32 elementary schools in the Ysleta Independent School District. The district serves approximately 47,000 students, mostly low-income and Latino, who live in the southeast area of the city. Over the last several years, the Ysleta Independent School District has achieved a reputation, in Texas and beyond, for its success in overseeing the "turn-around" of many of its 60 campuses, including Loma Terrace. For both the Ysleta district and Loma Terrace, this recognition has included praise for appropriate and high quality services to students with disabilities.

Population Served

A relatively large elementary school, Loma Terrace has a student body of almost 1,000 students. The vast majority (96 percent) of the students are Mexican American. Only three percent are white and less than one percent are African American. Most of the students (91.7 percent) are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program. More than one-third (37.2 percent) of the students are classified as having limited proficiency in English. In 1998–99, 103 students, or 10.4 percent of the student body, were receiving special education services. (This total includes 14 students who were receiving speech therapy only.) The percentage of Loma Terrace students identified for special education services was below the state average of 12.1 percent. At the end of the 1999–2000 school year, which was close to the time of the research visit, a total of 144 students—54 girls and 90 boys—were receiving special education services. (This figure includes students receiving speech therapy only.)[38]

Table 12: Loma Terrace Special Education Enrollment[39]

1997–1998		1998–1999		1999–2000	
School	**State**	**School**	**State**	**School**	**State**
8.8%	12.0%	10.4%	12.1%	12.8%	12.1%

Source: Texas Education Agency. Academic Excellence Indicator System. www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

Special Features and Programs

Loma Terrace has been operating as a schoolwide Title I school since 1995. The school takes the notion of "schoolwide" seriously, having implemented the same carefully selected reading, writing, and mathematics programs throughout the school, from kindergarten through sixth grade, and within all bilingual and special education classrooms as well. The bilingual education program serves over one-third of the student body, with bilingual classrooms at each grade level. Loma Terrace has designed its gifted and talented program as an enrichment program for all students.

The special education program at Loma Terrace consists of resource classes and content mastery. In addition, students with disabilities can benefit from the support of a full-time campus-based bilingual speech therapist and a district-sponsored Specific Reading Disorders Program. Students with severe disabilities who require instruction in a self-contained setting are served at another campus in the district.

Loma Terrace has established innovative programs that reach beyond the school to parents and families. These include a sequence of outreach services to parents with newborns, infants, and preschoolers. A lagging Parent Teacher Association has been refashioned into a successful Home and School Club.

Academic Performance

Since making a dramatic turn-around in 1994–95, Loma Terrace has consistently demonstrated high levels of academic success as measured by the Texas accountability system.[40] After its first year of operation as a Title I schoolwide program, Loma Terrace attained the second highest rating on the state accountability system, and since 1996–97 has achieved the highest

38 These figures were supplied by the campus.

39 These figures are drawn from the Texas Education Agency's AEIS website (www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis) and represent the enrollment reported to TEA as of the last Friday in October of each school year.

40 The accountability system rates elementary schools according to their attendance rates and their student performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The four levels of ratings for schools are Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, and Low-Performing.

rating of Exemplary. To receive an Exemplary rating, an elementary school must have at least a 94 percent attendance rate and more than 90 percent of their students (and of each subgroup of students) passing the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS).[41] As the table below indicates, for the last three years students at Loma Terrace have been performing well above the state average in all three subject areas of the TAAS.

Table 13: Loma Terrace Students Passing the TAAS*

	1997–1998[42]		1998–1999[43]		1999–2000	
	School	State	School	State	School	State
TAAS Reading	94.3%	87.0%	93.7%	86.5%	96.0%	87.4%
TAAS Writing	100%	87.4%	97.0%	88.2%	100%	88.2%
TAAS Mathematics	97.3%	84.2%	97.3%	85.7%	96.0%	87.4%

* Includes all students who participated, including students with disabilities.

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

It is important to note that Loma Terrace students who receive special education services also demonstrate high levels of performance on the state assessment. As the table below indicates, since 1998–99, students with disabilities at Loma Terrace have achieved well above the state average for their peers in special education despite relatively similar exemption rates.[44] Even more impressive, in 1999–2000, the performance of Loma Terrace students with disabilities was higher than the average for all students across the state in reading and writing and essentially equal to the state average for all students in mathematics.

Table 14: Loma Terrace Special Education Students' Performance and Participation on the TAAS

	1997–1998		1998–1999		1999–2000	
	School	State	School	State	School	State
Performance (% Passing)						
TAAS Reading	47.3%	51.1%	84.6%	66.6%	93.5%	71.0%
TAAS Writing	50.0%	46.0%	83.3%	62.7%	100.0%	65.6%
TAAS Mathematics	43.6%	46.7%	100.0%	64.6%	87.2%	71.1%
Participation (% Exempt)[45]	1.3%	5.2%	8.8%	6.9%	7.4%	7.1%

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

In addition to maintaining its Exemplary rating in the Texas accountability system for the last four years, Loma Terrace has received national recognition for its outstanding academic achievement; it was honored as a National Title I Distinguished School in 1999–2000.

Getting All Students to Achieve High Levels of Success

Inside the hallways and classrooms of Loma Terrace Elementary School the energy focused on student achievement and success is almost infectious; and indeed it is meant to be. The invigorating rock 'n roll music that the principal broadcasts at the beginning of each school day, the student "dream boards" decorating the halls, the kindergarten teacher casually using the word "polygon" as she hands a block to one of her students, and the special education teacher encouraging a student to use the thesaurus to find a more sophisticated word for a writing assignment—all hint at the intensity, focus, and dedication with which the staff at Loma Terrace routinely push their students to reach

41 The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is a criterion-referenced test given to students in grades 3 through 8 and grade 10. The test is administered during the spring semester of each school year. In elementary schools, the test measures student achievement in reading and mathematics (for grades 3, 5, and 6) and in reading, writing, and mathematics (for grade 4). Students with disabilities may be exempted from taking the test by a school's Admission, Review, and Dismissal committee, which determines the individual education plan for each student in special education. For more information see the glossary in Appendix A. (Source: Texas Education Agency's AEIS Glossary, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis)

42 Unadjusted scores as reported by the Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System in 1998 and used for school accountability rating purposes. (Source: www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/98/index.html)

43 Beginning in 1999, results also include special education test takers and Spanish-speaking test takers in grades 3 and 4 on the reading and mathematics portions of the TAAS.

44 According to the Texas Education Agency's AEIS website, although it is the intention to test every student in these grades, there are circumstances under which some students are exempted from the test. Students receiving special education services, for example, may receive an ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal) exemption for every test; and students may receive an LEP (Limited English Proficient) exemption for every test. (Source: www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis)

45 The percentage exempt, as reported by AEIS, indicates the percentage of students classified as exempt on all three exams.

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for and achieve high academic goals. The staff support students in meeting high academic expectations by implementing carefully focused programs and practices to make sure students learn and to address any barriers to their achievement.

Beliefs About Student Achievement and Learning

During the five years since becoming principal in 1994, Dale Skinner sought to instill the notion that each and every child at Loma Terrace can be successful. Teachers recall Skinner's startling announcement upon assuming the role of principal. "We will be one of the best schools in Texas. We will be an Exemplary school." But what once seemed to many a remote possibility has become a reality.

Student performance on the state accountability examination and excellent student attendance (97.5 percent in 1998–99) has earned the school the Exemplary rating in the state's accountability system for four years in a row. Loma Terrace students feel it is "cool" to be smart and win academic honors, and teachers hold high expectations for all students.

The Title I coordinator underlined the important role of high expectations in the school's success, "If you expect a certain behavior the kids will do anything they can to live up to that because they want to please the people who are significant in their lives." Indeed, to expect anything less than the best is seen as a serious disservice to the child. As one veteran teacher explained, "I make it very clear, this is what I expect and I'm not going to take less. I think it's only fair."

Specifically, teachers at all grade levels share the expectation that their students will be mastering curriculum which is one grade level beyond their actual grade in school and above the standards outlined in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Teachers routinely introduce materials and concepts that are up to two grade levels ahead, preparing students and challenging them for their work in future years. Thus, for example, kindergarten students are expected to be reading by the time they enter first grade. The school's high standards have been recognized by the district and wider community. For example, advanced course work has been added, and many remedial courses eliminated at the middle school that Loma Terrace students will attend.

In addition to the specific academic expectations for students, the administration has established a general expectation that everyone will work their hardest to meet their goals. No member of the school community is spared from these high expectations: no administrator, no teacher, and no student, whatever his or her circumstances may be. For example, the shared goal for students with disabilities is that with the support of intensive special education instruction provided in resource classrooms, students will be able to gain the missing foundations in their academic skills, catch up with their age peers, and ultimately be dismissed from the special education program.

"If you think you can't, we'll show you that you can"

A critical accompaniment to the emphasis on high expectations is the school's particular orientation to academic achievement—namely, that academic skills are not given attributes or talents, but rather are learned and developed through practice. The instructional specialist explained:

> I think a lot of our teachers have that risk-free environment where the kids feel okay about saying, "I don't get this. Can you help me?" I think that's where it stems from . . . that when they have that confidence, not only in themselves, but in their teacher, that they can do that, then the opportunity for success is there, because they know it's a skill.

At Loma Terrace, administrators and teachers actively embrace this philosophy, which they describe as "practicing success," and they see it as a major influence in all of their work. This orientation toward learning and mastery benefits teachers as well as students. They feel free, for example, to call upon each other and seek out the expertise of the instructional specialist, the administrators, and the Child Studies Team when faced with a professional challenge. As one administrator asserted confidently, "If you think you can't, we'll show you that you can!"

Making Sure Students Learn

The administration at Loma Terrace has taken many steps to ensure that the staff work together as a team and share a sense of responsibility for all students. As a result, this school with almost 1,000 students and about 100 total staff (including 80 instructional and 20 noninstructional staff members) feels like a cohesive and collaborative professional community focused on supporting student achievement. The administration and teaching staff also make sure that students learn by implementing a consistent curriculum and consistent auxiliary instructional and motivational programs throughout the whole school.

Administrative support for student-focused collaboration

At Loma Terrace, staff members from across the campus and teachers from all grade levels and disciplines are integral and valued members of the Loma Terrace "team" or "family." Whether they teach one of the primary grades or at the preschool level, whether they work in the regular classroom or in special education, all teachers see their work as contributing to the overall campus goal of supporting the achievement of all students.

This level of cohesion at Loma Terrace is no accident, but rather has been fostered by strategic administrative decisions. In addition to making astute choices in hiring, selecting only those individuals who demonstrate teaching expertise and who share the critical beliefs of the Loma Terrace team, the principal has also deliberately created opportunities for teachers to work together, to contribute to the shared goals of the campus, and to work with each other's students. Each of these experiences creates the conditions essential for student-focused collaboration.

The administration has tried to ensure that teachers work together by creating formal structures and providing time for teachers to meet. As the principal said, "We try to give them opportunities that compel them to work together." Regular grade-level meetings provide a forum where teachers can share their struggles and brainstorm with each other to find solutions. In addition, teachers of grades three through five, whose students take the state assessment, participate in an extra series of grade-level meetings in which they work together to design and plan mock assessments. Finally, representatives of each grade level meet on a regular schedule. This meeting exposes teachers to the instructional methods used at other levels. One teacher spoke about this enthusiastically: "We're always throwing these ideas out to each other. We're getting ideas and techniques from everybody." Perhaps more importantly, teachers become well acquainted with the specific academic expectations and standards for students at different grade levels.

The administration thoughtfully assigns and distributes responsibilities to ensure that all staff members are able to "earn respect through their deeds," and come to be seen as valuable members of the school team. The principal's use of the school's two special education teachers as "master teachers" and instructional specialists perhaps best exemplifies this approach. He selected them to serve as the campus representatives to an important training on state elementary school standards (TEKS). They were then responsible, along with the school's Title I coordinator, to train the entire Loma Terrace teaching staff on these standards. This assignment was strategic and unique. One special education teacher commented that they were the only special education teachers representing schools at this statewide training.

The special education teachers participate in all of the school's professional development activities in addition to attending the district's special education professional development. Describing their active role in these campuswide staff development sessions, the principal noted:

> **Very often their strategies are excellent because they work with kids that struggle with grade-level materials, and they have the techniques and expertise that allows the regular classroom teachers, who are outstanding, to benefit from them.**

Their strong presence in campus affairs contrasts with the more typical situation in which special education teachers are often isolated and separate from the regular education staff, and often accountable to district special education personnel rather than to campus administration.

The school's novel interpretation of its gifted and talented (GT) program enhances collaboration and a sense of shared responsibility among teachers at the same grade level. All Loma Terrace teachers receive GT training and all students—not just those identified as "gifted and talented"—participate in weekly activities and project-based enrichment classes. Students are grouped according to ability. During this enrichment period, teachers typically work with their colleagues' students. This experience extends the teachers' responsibility and influence to students beyond the confines of their classroom. One sixth-grade teacher clarified:

> **It can help with discipline too, because [the students] don't think they're just one teacher's kids. So, when you fuss at them when they're in the hall, they think, "Oh, I have to see you later, don't I?" "Yes, you do." So they're all our kids, they're not just one teacher's.**

Consistency in curriculum and instruction

At Loma Terrace, *all* students—in kindergarten through sixth grade, in bilingual classrooms and resource classrooms—are taught with the same curriculum and instructed using similar teaching strategies. Walking through the corridors at Loma Terrace one can observe this programmatic consistency through the grade levels and across special programs. In the fourth-grade wing similar student work is displayed in the monolingual and bilingual classrooms. The "ee, eh, aa" sounds of the Alice Nine phonograms are heard in the first-grade classroom and again in the portable building which houses the kindergarten through third-grade resource classes. "Dream Boards" of first graders and sixth graders line the bright hall along the

school's inner courtyard, each revealing its author's aspirations in colorful collage.

This consistency is a key strategy in the administration and staff's effort to promote high achievement for all Loma Terrace students. Several years ago, when the school was in the midst of change and rapid reform, the principal and staff reviewed research and selected a mathematics, reading, and writing curriculum that they could implement schoolwide. They wanted a program with a parallel curriculum for bilingual students and English Language Learners[46] that was consistent with the Loma Terrace philosophy of high expectations and included material for each grade that went well beyond grade level. The staff supplements this core curriculum with a phonics program and Accelerated Reading. Finally, the school's thorough incorporation of the TEKS contributes additional coherence and alignment across grade levels and programs. As the principal explained, "It's a very consistent program, bilingual, monolingual, K through 6. The TEKS makes it consistent, our instructional programs are consistent . . . and our children are coming up well prepared."

As teachers and administrators note, the consistency and careful alignment enhance student preparation and learning and at the same time underline the message of high expectations for *all* students. The school's approach to vocabulary building, a central feature of the core curriculum, illustrates how this works. The proper words for mathematical and other concepts are introduced in the earliest grade levels. Thus, for example, children in kindergarten learn from the start that an "apple" is a "noun" and not a "naming word." The principal introduces college-level vocabulary words—unsavory, badinage, and convivial, for example—each day during his morning broadcast. These practices provide a foundation for all future work with that word or concept. At the same time they cultivate an excitement about mastery and excellence. The Title I coordinator explained:

> **The kids love those words. They know what a noun is. They can tell you what it is. Well, why not call it a noun from the very beginning, rather than have them change gears like that. We've created an atmosphere where it's okay to be successful.**

The staff use the same strategy of consistency and alignment in teaching students the skills and concepts needed to master the state assessment. Thus, although elementary students are tested only in grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 in Texas, preparation at Loma Terrace begins in kindergarten, and practice testing occurs each year in grades 1 through 6. Kindergarten teachers begin to introduce the objectives covered on the third-grade test, modifying and tailoring content and instruction so that it is appropriate for those students. One kindergarten teacher observed:

> **In measurement, for example, [the third-grade students] measure. But we can do that too. We can measure with paper clips, shoes. We take those skills and we put them on our level. So when they get in the third grade, they can take the concrete and transfer it to the abstract.**

Loma Terrace teachers present a motivational curriculum in addition to the academic curriculum. The principal stressed the importance of this central and defining feature of the Loma Terrace program:

> **Each teacher is required to look for and develop resource materials that have nothing to do with academics, but everything to do with making kids believe in themselves. It's just as important as the academics. You have to make the kids want to learn.**

Just as with academics, this motivational curriculum is implemented schoolwide—its lessons and activities, its central themes and goals presented and reinterpreted at each grade level and in each program. The purpose is to instill in the students the attitudes, habits, and practices that will help make them successful. In particular, Loma Terrace teachers and administrators teach the students how to set and work toward goals. This skill, crucial at any age, is developed on an ongoing basis, and is revisited and elaborated each year, through the activity of making Dream Boards. During this activity students define their individual goals (primarily academic), and then develop a plan of action which will help them reach their goals.

The students are also expected to develop a strong work ethic. The staff give Work Ethic awards honoring students who have been especially diligent and hard working, and post student photographs on the Work Ethic bulletin board at the school's main entrance. Moreover, all adults on campus are expected to model this work ethic on a daily basis. One sixth-grade teacher said, "[The principal] expects an exemplary work ethic. Just to give 150 percent! If you are motivated, your kids are going to be motivated." Reiterating the schoolwide scope of this motivational instruction, the principal said,

> **Every single student in this school sets individual goals. These goals take them towards their dreams. And underneath their goals, every student has posted a plan, a plan of action that will allow them to attain their goal. Then we teach them on a daily basis that they must work with relentless**

[46] English Language Learners refers to students who might otherwise be designated as having "limited English proficiency."

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> determination on their plan so they can accomplish their goals, so they can accomplish their dreams.

Addressing Barriers to Student Learning

The phrase "no excuses" best captures the Loma Terrace staff's approach to barriers and challenges they encounter in educating their students. The staff take a consistently proactive approach to obstacles, identifying them early and responding effectively. The strong academic focus of the school's preschool parenting program and kindergarten facilitate early identification and response to emerging learning problems. The easy flow of informal communication and the well-developed collaborative structures that exist at the school facilitate quick and creative problem-solving by the staff.

A proactive approach to problems

Loma Terrace staff maintain a keen focus on their goal of educating *all* students and direct their energies toward creating the solutions that will promote successful outcomes. For example, while a high mobility rate might seem to pose an insurmountable barrier, the Loma Terrace staff work aggressively with new students and their families, offering the students additional academic support through tutoring, and making parents aware of school's high standards and expectations. While a parent's inability to speak fluent English may seem to preclude their involvement in a student's developing language and literacy skills, Loma Terrace teachers work to enlist the Spanish-speaking parents' support, tape recording the story or daily reading so that the parent and child can engage in the homework together. The principal described the school's characteristic approach:

> Our teachers, they don't give excuses. We're in a culture of success and we don't accept excuses. Children can learn. All children can. You might have to work a little harder, you might have to overcome a few obstacles, because we realize that our kids statistically are underdogs, but we won't accept that and the people won't accept that. If the student is here we've got to teach them. We've got to work on those obstacles.

The school's sequence of early intervention programs for parents of infants and toddlers—Ready to Be Ready—provides a prime example of this proactive approach. Developed by a former Loma Terrace counselor, the program consists of two six-week sessions. The first session, Building Blocks, is for parents of newborns and infants, and the second, Jump Start, is for parents of preschool children. The purpose is to introduce parents to ways of interacting with their children and to activities that will help prepare them for school. As one of the school's coordinators for this program explained, "It involves empowering the parents with teaching, because they are the children's first teachers."

While the Ready to Be Ready program is designed to respond to a potential barrier, it goes well beyond remediation and reflects the school's high expectations. The program materials and take-home packets include guided questions and hands-on activities developed to align with the state objectives outlined in the TEKS. So even before enrollment in school, the students and parents have begun to work toward meeting the state's academic performance standards.

Early identification of problems

At Loma Terrace, emerging problems in a student's learning come into view early, and as a result are also more likely to be addressed proactively. The strong academic focus of the Ready to Be Ready program and kindergarten and the ongoing practice of schoolwide student assessment contribute to the speed and precision with which problems are identified.

Teachers report that parents who have gone through the Ready to Be Ready program are better able to notice their children's problems and bring them to the teachers' attention. Not only does the program help parents become more aware of their children's development, but it also tends to stimulate greater ongoing involvement and more active tracking of their children's progress in school. In addition, the kindergarten program at Loma Terrace is focused on developing early literacy and is not, one teacher explained, "just sandbox, naps, and parades." Because of this focus, teachers are able to notice potential learning problems before students even enter first grade.

Loma Terrace staff use data from regular student assessments of all students in all grade levels and programs to identify student weaknesses. Indeed, Loma Terrace was one of 13 schools in the nation recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for its use of student assessment data. Teachers of kindergarten through grade 2 use the Texas Primary Reading Inventory to assess student progress, while teachers in grades 3 through 6 use results from the TAAS to keep a close eye on student achievement and detect any problems. The school conducts "mock" administrations of the TAAS twice a year, in November and February, in addition to the regularly scheduled administration in April. The principal underlined the school's approach to using student performance data: "We know everything about the kids. We use data for one purpose: to find out where kids are weak and to attack those weaknesses."

As teachers at Loma Terrace are quick to point out, their ongoing attentiveness to each of their

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students can often be the most important source of data in heading off a major problem. One veteran teacher described this simple but essential strategy and emphasized the importance of taking the time to talk with the student directly to explore concerns:

> They're just rocking along and all of a sudden they shut down or all of a sudden they're a discipline problem or something. You know something is going on. It's not a major "Let's call up the National Guard." I think a lot of times if you'll just take the time to sit down and talk to the kid, they're your greatest resource to find out what's happening.

Collaborative problem-solving

The power of Loma Terrace's cohesive and collaborative team is very obvious in the school's response to identified student needs. Teachers and administrators turn to each other with certainty and ease, and feel comfortable making use of the support personnel and programs available to assist students.

"When you get teachers together you have much more powerful solutions"

The staff's extensive knowledge of each other's skills, interests, and experience comes in handy when various challenges arise. For example, one fourth-grade class had a large number of new students who arrived at Loma Terrace without the expected and appropriate level of skills. The regular classroom teacher drew on the expertise of a special education teacher to develop appropriate alternative materials for these students. An assistant principal explained:

> There's a lot of determination that all children will succeed. Teachers go out of their way to find ways to assist students. It's just a matter of communicating enough with each other so that people who are in need know people who have the skill.

In addition to generating quick solutions to such instructional dilemmas, this communication helps teachers respond to behavioral and emotional problems that pose barriers to student academic achievement. For example, an assistant principal was able to decrease the fears of a frightened child who had been referred to foster care by putting him in touch with a familiar teacher, who herself had been a foster parent. And a sixth-grade teacher, aware of an administrator's commitment to teaching students problem-solving skills, called on her to help a group of students work out an ongoing conflict. Highlighting the power of the school's collaborative problem-solving, and underscoring the administration's role in facilitating it, an assistant principal said,

> We don't get in their way, but what we try to do is to communicate and then allow the teachers to come together. And often they come up with solutions. We don't. We're not solution givers. Our solutions are only from our little narrow perspective. But when you get teachers together you have much more powerful solutions.

In addition to turning to each other informally, teachers at Loma Terrace also readily turn to the school's formal support personnel. When faced with an instructional problem, the regular education teachers typically will consult with the school's Title I coordinator, who serves as an instructional specialist. The Title I coordinator spends most of each day in the classrooms, modeling lessons and helping teachers try new and more effective instructional strategies. These model lessons are jointly developed with the teachers and tailored to their specific needs and requests. Each session includes a planning meeting with the teacher and a debriefing meeting to discuss the instructional methods and their rationale. According to the Title I coordinator, her help in the classroom is perceived as "a pretty risk-free thing." As she said, "I've been trained to be an appraiser, but I'm not an appraiser. I just go in and provide support." Using words that echo the school's "culture of success" she continued:

> My job, what I try to instill in the teachers, and what they try to instill in the kids, is the belief that if I can't do it, my teacher or someone else is going to help me learn how to do it. That it's okay right now to maybe not know everything, but that doesn't mean I can't.

Teachers at Loma Terrace also know that they can turn to the school's Child Studies Team when they are concerned about a student's progress. This team, made up of six staff members who bring together a wide range of expertise about students and the school's resources, was designed as "a place to come to figure out how to best help kids." One member explained, "[T]he Child Studies Team is [there] to use as a sounding board or as an idea bank for teachers that have had any types of problems with students." With the assistant principal, a special education teacher, a bilingual speech therapist, the Title I coordinator, a bilingual fourth-grade teacher, and a veteran sixth-grade teacher as members, the team is indeed a rich resource.

While school policy requires that any student who is being considered for a referral for special education services or for retention be referred to this committee, the Child Studies Team is not exclusively a "pre-referral" team. It is a resource for any teacher with a concern about a student's progress. As one teacher explained:

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> It's there for whatever problems you are having. You know this child would not qualify [for special education services] if he was referred, but he's driving you up the wall and you need help.

The "child study" process is quick but intensive. The teacher makes a brief written referral and prepares a variety of data about the student to share with the team. This data must include samples of the student's work spanning a period of about one month, in addition to report cards, standardized assessment scores, observations about behavior, and notes about parent interactions and concerns. Generally the team is able to meet with the teacher within about one or two weeks after the referral. Together they review the data, and, drawing on all their expertise, they try to assess the student's needs and suggest strategies the teacher might try next.

In some cases these interventions involve using the extra support systems that are available at the school, such as the counseling services, the Specific Reading Disorders Program, or the peer tutoring and "buddy" program. In other cases the team members' combined insights help teachers conceptualize a student's situation in an entirely new way and lead to specific modifications or innovative instructional strategies to assist the student. For example, the special education teacher on the team frequently shares the multisensory instructional techniques she uses with students with disabilities to assist students who are struggling in the regular classroom. Teachers find this resource very helpful. One sixth grade teacher underscored the benefits:

> I think it has helped. It's helped with ideas that maybe we haven't thought of before. But it's really looking at all that material, and since we have that committee everybody has different ideas. They have input and so the teachers go back and try the different strategies hoping the kids will get better. And sometimes it happens, and sometimes it doesn't.

Each year the Child Studies Team assists teachers with 60 to 80 students, and of these only about 50 percent (30 to 40 students) go on to be referred for special education services.

Identifying Students in Need of Special Education Services

At Loma Terrace, referrals for special education services are made only after all other interventions available in the regular education program and ancillary school support programs have been tried and are not adequate to meet the student's needs. At the same time that Loma Terrace teachers work hard to support every student within the regular education program, they also make sure that those students who are showing signs of learning difficulties benefit from the intensive special education services available at the school as early as possible.

Using Team Review to Assess Potential Referrals

To ensure that a referral to special education is appropriate, and indeed the "last intervention," the school requires that any referral to special education first be presented at the school's Child Studies Team. All referrals for special education testing ultimately come from the Child Studies Team. The only exception to this is when parents request that their child be tested. Any teacher who believes that a student might benefit from special education services must collect a wide variety of data about the student and present this to the Child Studies Team. This process is the first step in "studying the child." Then, unless the student's situation is extremely clear and the team agrees immediately that a referral is needed, they generally recommend that the teacher try a series of interventions tailored to the specific needs of the student. The teacher observes the effectiveness of these new strategies for a period of time, and if necessary meets again with the team to review the student's progress and reconsider referral for special education services.

About half the original referrals to Child Studies Team eventually go on to become referrals to special education, and about 80 percent of those referred (approximately 24 to 32 students per year) are identified as eligible for services and entitled to special education programs. The district diagnostician who conducts the testing for students at Loma Terrace praised the team's judgment in making appropriate referrals. As she said, "I can tell you that the majority of kids I tested here that were referred, the majority did meet the eligibility, usually for a learning disability." Among students referred and found eligible for special education services, additional resources are provided through school-wide and targeted approaches.

While the Child Studies Team helps ensure that referrals for testing for special education are appropriate, it also seems to facilitate earlier identification of students who need specialized services. The pattern of referrals reflects the tendency at Loma Terrace to identify students for services in the early elementary school years. The diagnostician, comparing the referrals she received from Loma Terrace with those she typically gets from other schools in the Ysleta Independent School District, said, "It seemed like I

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would get more referrals in the lower grades—first, second, third—which I felt were very appropriate."

Addressing Issues of Dual Language in Identifying Disabilities

Given the relatively high percentage of students at Loma Terrace who do not speak English as their native language, the Child Studies Team and the diagnostician serving the Loma Terrace students make an effort to ensure that a student's difficulties with English are not mistaken as a learning disability, or conversely, that learning problems are not obscured by a lack of fluency in English. First, the participation of the teacher who developed and now leads the school's bilingual program provides a valuable perspective to the Child Studies Team. Second, the school's full-time bilingual speech therapist serves on the team and contributes much-needed insight about normal patterns of language development in English and Spanish. As the administrator on the team explained,

> [L]anguage acquisition continues to be a major key, and so having some knowledge of language acquisition and language acquisition skills and what's normal and what's not is very, very important for us. . . . [W]hen we are talking about a student and trying to get that fine line drawn—Is this a language processing problem? Is it just a language problem? Is it an articulation problem?—[The bilingual speech therapist] has really been a definite asset to the group.

Finally, when it comes to the diagnostic testing itself, the diagnostician reviews a wide variety of data (including a home language survey, the student's history in bilingual education, results of language tests done at school, and Language Assessment Scale scores) before deciding whether to test the student in English, Spanish, or both languages. In those cases when the student is tested in both languages he or she must meet the requirement for disability classification in the two languages in order to be eligible for special education services.

Building a Collaborative Team at the Initial Admission Meeting

A student's identification for special education services becomes complete when a school administrator, the special education teacher, the regular classroom teacher, the diagnostician or other individual qualified to interpret the diagnostic tests, and the student's parents meet together and come to consensus on an individual educational program (IEP) for the student. In Texas the initial meeting for admission to the special education programs, and each subsequent meeting to evaluate the student's progress and continuing need for special education services, is referred to as an ARD (Admission, Review, Dismissal). At Loma Terrace, this typically occurs about six months after the student' s problem was first noticed. Loma Terrace staff use this initial meeting as an opportunity to establish trust and collaboration among the three partners—the parents, the regular classroom teacher, and the special education teacher. While federal guidelines require that the special education placement should be a collaborative process, the staff at Loma Terrace employ some especially effective strategies to make this a reality.

Parents know students best

The special education teachers at Loma Terrace work with the assumption that parents are key partners and approach the initial ARD with care to nurture this important relationship. The parents' participation in the initial meeting is necessary. The special education teachers at Loma Terrace have been quite successful getting parents to attend the ARDs. When parents are difficult to reach, the special education teachers enlist the help of the school's full-time parent liaison to hand deliver formal paperwork, including the "invitations" to the initial meeting. The parent liaison can make personal follow-up home visits to get needed signatures and confirm mutually convenient dates for the ARD meetings. With the parent liaison's help, a once long and cumbersome process is now accomplished in a matter of days.

The parent liaison's involvement brings other benefits as well; because she is someone known and respected in the community, parents and family members feel comfortable expressing their deepest concerns and fears about special education and asking the questions that they most need to ask. Reflecting on her home visits with parents of students with disabilities, the parent liaison said:

> [The parents] start asking me questions about the program and some parents don't want to sign, because they say they've heard that [special education services] are only for retarded children. I say, "No, these programs are good for your children; they'll help them get ahead in whichever area the help is needed." So I explain to them, and they know me, so right away, "Okay." So they'll sign and come to those meetings.

At the initial meeting the special education teachers involve the parents in every step of the process, actively inviting their input and feedback throughout

the meeting. The time this takes is well worth every minute, according to the special education teachers at Loma Terrace. As one teacher explained,

> You can't rush through that initial placement ARD. Take the time to go over the forms, but also to establish an open communication with the parents. When I go over the classroom goals and objectives I tell them, "Right now this is what I see your child needing to work on. Are there any other things that you see are problems? Do you want me to add anything to these goals and objectives?" So that they see that they are a vital part of this process.

A parent's account of joint problem-solving that occurred at her child's ARD provides an example:

> My daughter has a visual problem. In the ARD room we were talking and we were all comparing notes, her regular teacher, the [special education] teacher, the diagnostician, and myself. We found out that . . . when she did work on the board she could do it, when she did work on the overhead, seeing it up, she could do it, but when it came down to here [gesturing at the desk] she couldn't. In the discussion that we ended up having that's what we noticed. One of the modifications was that they . . . moved her desk towards where the lockers are and they gave her magnets so she can do her work standing. . . . That was one of the things we discussed, and it was strange because I knew something, and you knew something, and she knew something, and when we all started talking together we discovered that was one way to help her. It seems to be working.

General education teacher most important

Establishing the regular education teacher's ongoing commitment and involvement in the student's education is equally important. It is critical that the student's classroom teacher leave the meeting with the knowledge that they will have the support of the student's special education teacher. As the interim director of special education for the Ysleta Independent School District said,

> [E]specially in the initial meetings, that regular education teacher is the most important person at the meeting because they know that student better than anyone else [at the school]. We have to make sure that we let that teacher know that it takes a team effort to educate this child, that we're not going to give this teacher a modification page and shove that kid back in her class and say, "Okay, take care of business." We're going to provide them the support they need. That regular education teacher knows that if they've got a special education student in their class and they're having problems, that they can go to the special education teacher to get help.

In order to accomplish this outcome, the special education teacher will emphasize her availability and willingness to work with the students. The special education teachers' track record of consistent and active involvement in campus affairs and their demonstrated flexibility in working with classroom teachers lends a real credibility to these offers.

Another practice that helps foster this working collaboration is the fact that the team developing the IEP is strategic in recommending modifications, suggesting only those which are most important and practical. The Title I coordinator, who often works with teachers who are implementing modifications, spoke appreciatively of the school's approach:

What we've tried to do is be very selective with the modifications, based on, hopefully, exactly what the child needs and what is reasonable for the teacher to be able to implement in that classroom. If the ARD committee checks off an inordinate amount [of modifications], the teacher's going to look at that and it's going to be like a kid who has a hundred problems to do on the math page, and they don't have the first idea. They're just going to totally shut down. I think it's kind of a two-way street where we really try to be realistic and assume the teacher has 22 kids in that room.

Ensuring the Success of Students With Disabilities

At Loma Terrace, special education is not limited to the intensive and specialized instruction that goes on in the school's two resource classrooms, but rather is best described as a carefully coordinated set of interventions that occur throughout the school. Indeed, the staff feel that the almost daily collaboration between a student's special education teacher, regular classroom teacher, and parents is as critical to the student's success as the rigorous lessons and one-on-one coaching from the special education staff. The school holds all students—including students with disabilities—to the same high standards, presenting a consistent and challenging curriculum in all classrooms, and routinely assessing learning and performance.

The staff at Loma Terrace view the special education program as a "temporary assistance program" that provides very intensive, specialized, and individually tailored instruction to students who have demonstrated significant difficulty in mastering grade-appropriate curriculum. The overriding goal for students receiving special education services is that with

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additional specialized support they will be able to catch up with their classmates and be successful in the regular classroom. The principal shared the rationale for the school's approach: "We realize that the kids aren't going to be sheltered forever. Society's performance based. We have an obligation to make sure we prepare [students] for society."

Range of Special Education Services

The majority of special education services at Loma Terrace are provided in daily resource classes available to students with disabilities in kindergarten through sixth grade. ("Resource" is the adjective used at the school to describe the special classes, the special education teachers, and the dominant special education program or model.) Students come to the resource classroom for a period of daily instruction (determined according to the individual educational program—on average 30 or 45 minutes) in the needed subject areas of reading, language arts, or math. The students receive a lot of one-on-one attention during resource classes because the classes are small and usually taught by the teacher and one or two assistants. In the school year 1999–2000, approximately 75 percent of Loma Terrace students identified with disabilities received this form of service.

The school's special education program also includes content mastery, a less intensive service in which students receive intermittent help as needed from the special education teachers, but obtain their primary instruction in the regular education classroom. This model, not widely used at Loma Terrace, is occasionally provided to help students in resource make a transition away from special education support, and also to help prepare sixth-grade students for the greater independence of middle school. In 1999–2000 only four students received content mastery, and two of these were sixth graders. Speech therapy is available for students in kindergarten through sixth grade.

The special education program at Loma Terrace is relatively well staffed with two full-time special education teachers, three full-time special education assistants (one of whom is bilingual), one full-time bilingual speech therapist, and three college interns (who work part-time or full-time depending on their college schedule). The special education staff acknowledged that the lack of a bilingual special education teacher was a significant limitation. The bilingual special education assistant provides services to students with limited English proficiency under the supervision of the special education teachers. District-based occupational and physical therapists offer ancillary support to Loma Terrace students.

Special education services for students with limited proficiency in English

Like many other schools in Texas, Loma Terrace faced the problem of a severe shortage of certified bilingual special education teachers. During the 1999–2000 school year Loma Terrace did not have a special education teacher who was certified to teach bilingual special education. However, true to their commitment to ensure the success of each student, the teaching staff took steps to meet the needs of their students who had limited proficiency in English. These steps included having the ARD committee not only develop the individual education program (IEP) for the students, but also specify the most appropriate location for those services. In some cases the ARD recommended that the IEP be implemented in the regular education bilingual classroom.

The school's special education teachers collaborated with the bilingual regular education teacher to provide extra support and assist with modifications to meet the student's needs. In most cases, students with limited proficiency in English received their instruction in the resource classroom where the school's bilingual special education assistant worked alongside the special education teacher. The bilingual assistant helped the teacher provide the instruction, assisted with translations and with monolingual Spanish and bilingual materials so that students received intensive special education instruction in their native language. In fall 2000, Loma Terrace was able to hire a certified bilingual special education teacher, enhancing their ability to provide appropriate services to students who are not proficient in English.

Intensive and Specialized Instruction in the Resource Classroom

The special education staff at Loma Terrace take advantage of the resource class model to provide intensive and specialized instruction to students with disabilities. As one of the special education teachers explained,

> From the beginning our goal is to have the children out of resource, which is, I believe, why this school has resource. If a child has been identified as having a learning disability they have not been successful in the regular classroom. They need an intense program to build on those basic skills, and it can't just be done "hit and miss" through content mastery. It needs to be done day in and day out. It has to be a consistent program.

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In the portable building which houses the resource classes for the early primary grades, one typically sees carefully orchestrated small-group instruction and with an eclectic but deliberate mix of specialized multisensory instructional techniques. For example, during one visit, the teacher introduced a mathematics problem to the whole group, but quickly changed gears, deftly directing her aides to provide one-on-one instruction to specific students when she noticed their difficulty working with the planned materials. During this lesson, the teacher used an instructional system that provides students with concrete visual and kinesthetic cues to use while making each computation. Every student was engaged in the lesson, and his or her progress was being monitored closely.

During another visit, the special education teacher was working one-on-one with a small boy. She introduced phonograms, guiding the student's hands to tap twice when a phonogram consisted of two letters, kinesthetically reinforcing his experience looking at, hearing, and repeating the sound of each phonogram presented. The student was intent, his expression of earnest concentration relaxing for a moment into a shy smile when he mastered a new set of sounds. Regardless of the content of the specific lessons, the goal in the resource classroom is always the same—to develop basic academic skills and fill in any gaps. Drawing on the building metaphor she uses with her students, one special education teacher explained, "Our goal is to fill in all those bricks so that you have a solid foundation for your house of knowledge."

The school's commitment to the academic achievement of students with disabilities is reflected in the administration's support for the intensive instruction provided in the resource classes. These classes are never cancelled and substitutes are always supplied when needed. One special education teacher, with many years of experience at other schools, noted that this level of administrative support for special education was very rare.

High Expectations for Students with Disabilities

The school's high expectations extend to all students, including students with disabilities. The specific expectation is that students receiving special education services will ultimately be learning and performing at their appropriate grade level. Several strategies contribute to this goal. First, the curriculum presented in the resource classrooms is kept at a challenging level. Second, students with disabilities are constantly participating in grade-level activities in the regular classroom. And third, when appropriate, the progress of students with disabilities is measured using the same assessment and standards as applied to students in the regular education program.

The students' individual educational programs (IEPs) are based on the Texas state standards as defined in the TEKS. The special education teachers use appropriate grade-level textbooks and materials and include grade-level objectives in their lessons. Reflecting upon the activities in her fourth-grade class earlier that day, one special education teacher described her approach:

> **I do not water down that curriculum! That's why we used the thesaurus this morning to look up the word "tense." We have a dictionary on the table. The students were supposed to replace the "baby words" in the passage with another word. We don't like baby words!**

Students receiving special education services are expected to participate, with the necessary modifications and support, in the lessons and activities of the regular classroom and to complete assignments for both classes. The principal described how this works:

> **Students [with disabilities] are getting a lot of instruction that is at grade level. Even though they may struggle, and their grade is not determined by [their performance in the regular classroom], they are exposed to grade-level material. If you just don't tell them they can't do it, they just don't know. We don't get into situations very often at all where they get frustrated or totally lost. Our classroom teachers do modify their homework, and do modify their work in other subjects. But the kids are exposed to everything that the other kids are exposed to. I really think that's a big benefit to them.**

While some parents mentioned instances when students felt these dual responsibilities were confusing, most everyone agreed that the benefits outweighed any disadvantages. Communication between the regular education and special education teachers was critical to keeping the expectations clear and consistent. Speaking of the benefits of the school's high academic standards, a parent of a student with disabilities said, "They're stricter [at Loma Terrace]. The stricter they are with him the more he learns. If you give him a chance, he'll learn."

Whenever appropriate, the performance of students with disabilities is measured using the same assessment and standards that apply to all students. The administration and staff strive to test all those students who can appropriately take the TAAS or at least one section of it. The school follows state and district guidelines in determining the most appropriate method of assessment on a student-by-student basis. Making reference to the state's accountability ratings, the principal explained that the school's goal is to be

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"Exemplary with Integrity," or in other words, to achieve the highest state accountability rating without inappropriate exemptions. The Ysleta Independent School District includes student exemption data in the evaluation of all principals. For the last two years the Loma Terrace exemption rate has been slightly higher than the state average. In response, the principal personally reviews all exemptions with the two special education teachers and his administrative team to ensure that they are appropriate.

All students take the school's "mock TAAS," which is given in the fall. The administration uses this data not just to measure individual student progress, but to provide a longitudinal overview of the gains of students with disabilities as they progress through the school's programs. When students do not take the official version of the state assessment they take an alternative assessment. The data from these alternative assessments are used in a similar fashion to measure student growth and teachers' success in promoting achievement.

Communication Focused on Student Achievement

The fluid and easy-going communication among the staff at Loma Terrace is especially important to ensuring the success of students with disabilities. General classroom teachers and special education teachers often confer daily about the students they share. This might be an informal "heads-up" about a difficult situation a child is experiencing, or a more formal and in-depth exchange about a student's progress. For example, one sixth-grade teacher described collaborating with the special education teacher to call a parent conference about a student whose performance suddenly started to bottom out.

Several regular classroom teachers noted that their communication with the special education teachers led to mutual flexibility in scheduling. As a result, regular classroom teachers felt freer to ask students to complete important activities with the understanding that they would make up the time in resource the next day. One sixth-grade teacher said:

> I like to keep my kids in a lot. Instead of them being pulled out, I'll say I can keep them in because we are going over something new. And I think we all expect them to do the same work that everybody else is doing or at least for them to try it . . . . So we do have that kind of contact [with the special education teachers].

Ongoing dialogue also helps ensure that students with disabilities will be able to participate in the wide variety of extracurricular programs at the school.

Perhaps most important, the teachers work together to make sure that special education is indeed "a temporary assistance program" and to prepare students to exit the program. With this shared goal, the regular education and special education teachers compare notes about a student's performance in a range of areas to see if he or she can go on "monitor" status. Monitor status is the name used by staff at Loma Terrace to describe a transitional service in special education. Specifically, students who have made significant progress in the resource classroom and are demonstrating the ability to succeed in the regular classroom are reviewed in a formal ARD and placed on monitor status. Resource class time is reduced and special education support limited to assistance with regular classroom assignments. The goal is to make sure students have the proper amount of support as they become more independent in the regular classroom. A parent described how this communication helped make her son's gradual transition from the special education program more successful:

> I really liked the way they followed up with him and watched and made sure. When they thought he was ready they went ahead and let him stay in the classroom to try to handle the full class load, and then they did make modifications as they were needed and decided by both teachers.

Similarly, the special education teachers work hard to maintain regular communication with their students' parents. This contact is maintained through a "daily homework folder." The teachers use this folder as forum for dialogue with parents. One special education teacher explained:

> I tell them, "That homework folder is a communication for me and for you. If [the student] has not slept all night, or if the family pet died or something, you write me a little note so that I can be aware of the problem and I can be sensitive to the child's needs." It might be six weeks of a parent just signing the folder everyday and seeing that there's a star. But the one time that I need to get a note or I need the IEP report card back or something, they're in the habit of everyday communication.

At Loma Terrace many people and practices come together to support the success of students with disabilities. Intensive and high quality instruction in the resource classroom, exposure to grade level curriculum in the regular classroom, high expectations and a "culture of success," and thoughtful coordination across classrooms and environments—all seem to contribute to the high achievement of the school's students with disabilities. Reflecting on Loma Terrace's success, the school's former diagnostician said simply, "It just all works really well together."

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It does seem to be working really well together. The impressive performance of students with disabilities on the state assessment clearly indicates the school's success with this population. In 1999–2000, more than 92 percent of Loma Terrace students with disabilities took the state assessment. They far outdistanced their peers throughout the state in all three subjects—reading, writing, and mathematics. Furthermore, with 93.5 percent passing reading, 100 percent passing writing, and 87.2 percent passing mathematics, Loma Terrace students with disabilities performed significantly higher than the state average for *all* students in reading and writing, and about equally as well the state average for *all* students in mathematics.

Learning, not labels

The staff at Loma Terrace share a unique orientation to special instructional services and support programs for students. Rather than creating or implementing isolated services to support specially identified subpopulations of students, staff at Loma Terrace keep the focus on individual learning and actively use the special programs and support personnel, drawing together strategies and resources to benefit teaching and learning across the school. Teachers at Loma Terrace realize that labels and categories do not adequately capture the complex learning needs of a child and that a mixture of strategies drawn from a variety of programs might best meet the individual's needs. As an administrator explained,

> **It's all about good teaching. It's not about labels, it's about learning; and taking that individual with their knowledge and beliefs and misconceptions and working with them wherever it's going to be most effective.**

New Directions

In 2000–01, under the leadership of the new principal, Susana Gonzalez, Loma Terrace has continued to refine and improve its capacity to educate students with disabilities. A full-time certified bilingual special education teacher has been added to the special education team. The school has also made a significant shift in its approach to educating students with disabilities. In response to teachers' requests to provide more instruction in the regular classroom and to decrease any interruption to instructional time, the school has increased its range of services. They have moved away from the almost exclusive emphasis on the resource model and have begun to implement a "helping consultation" model. Resource classes remain a strong and effective component of Loma Terrace program for those students who need this level of support.

In the helping consultation model, the special education teachers and assistants work with students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Before the transition to this model, the progress and needs of each Loma Terrace student with disabilities were reviewed in ARD meetings, and many were dismissed from the resource program and designated for helping consultation services in the regular education classroom. According to the staff, these students are flourishing in the classroom. The beauty of this model is that the special education staff is not only able to assist students with disabilities, but they can assist other students struggling in the regular classroom and support the classroom teacher as well.

The new model will be evaluated by the staff this summer. At this point the outlook is promising and the school community is quite enthusiastic. Indeed, the new approach builds on Loma Terrace's well developed habits of collaboration and it represents an extension of the school's efforts to provide the very best mix of instructional methods and services to all students. After all, "It's not about labels, it's about learning."

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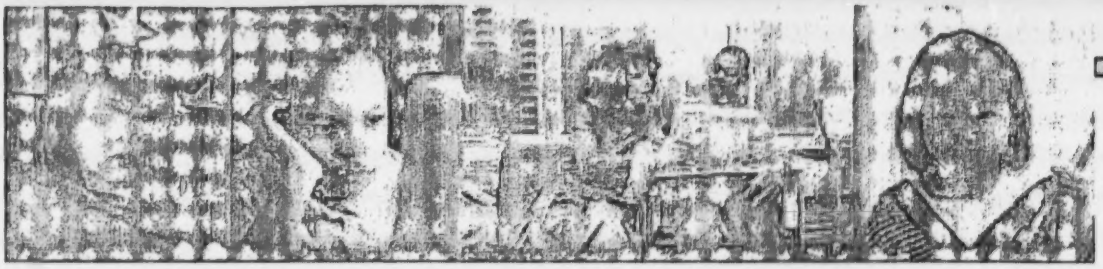

T. W. Ogg Elementary School

Brazosport Independent School District
Clute, Texas

1998–1999 School Year

Student Enrollment	575
Attendance Rate	97.3%
Grades Served	EE–5

Demographics

African American	14.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.9%
Hispanic	58.3%
Native American	0%
White	26.3%
Limited English Proficiency	19.8%
Mobility	22.0 %
Low Income (Free or Reduced-Price Lunch)	68.5%
Special Education Enrollment	15.1%

Performance

1998–1999 Texas Accountability Rating	Exemplary
1990–2000 Texas Accountability Rating	Exemplary

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T. W. Ogg Elementary School

Brazosport Independent School District
Clute, Texas

School Background

T. W. Ogg Elementary School is located in the Texas Gulf community of Clute (population 13,000), one of eight small communities that make up the Brazosport area. Ogg is one of three elementary schools in Clute and one of 11 elementary schools in the Brazosport Independent School District. Although situated just a short distance from the petrochemical and fishing complexes that dominate the local landscape, the school's campus is anything but industrial. The "Land of Ogg" has adopted the Wizard of Oz ideals of courage, knowledge, and heart. The school provides a warm and inviting environment where students are challenged yet supported in their studies and where—consistent with the school's Wizard of Oz décor—teaching and learning are fun. A friendly tin man figure, created by the parent of an Ogg student, greets children in the front hall, and the grade levels are organized into colorful wings with inviting names such as Munchkin Land, Kansas, the Enchanted Forest, and Emerald City.

Population Served

The student population of Ogg is diverse: 58.3 percent of its students are identified as Hispanic; 26.3 percent as white; 14.6 percent as African American; and .9 percent as Asian/Pacific Islander. The majority of students (68.5 percent) are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and 19.8 percent are designated as having limited proficiency in English. In 1998–99, 15.1 percent of the students at Ogg received special education services. Although slightly higher than the state average, the school's special education enrollment figures include all the students with disabilities from the school's attendance area as well as a number of students from other regions in the district.[47] The figures represent all children receiving special education services at the school, including children in the early childhood program, life skills classroom, and developmental learning cluster. They also include 45 students who receive speech therapy only. At the time of our visit in spring 2000, 20 girls and 40 boys were receiving special education services, excluding those receiving speech therapy only.

Table 15: Ogg Special Education Enrollment[48]

1997–1998		1998–1999		1999–2000	
School	**State**	**School**	**State**	**School**	**State**
13.6%	12.0%	15.1%	12.1%	13.3%	12.1%

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

Special Features and Programs

Ogg is home to a number of special programs, including several district initiatives. It is the bilingual school for the north side of Brazosport ISD, houses the behavioral unit for seven schools in the district, and has a self-contained life skills classroom which serves children with disabilities from at least one other school in the area. One of the district reading specialists also has her office at Ogg. Other features include schoolwide Title I support; a Primary Basic Skills program; early education, special education, and preschool classrooms; a Creative Education Institute computer lab; enrichment activities such as literary competitions; and other services designed to meet the needs of individual students.

Academic Performance

Ogg has a long record of academic success as measured by the Texas accountability system.[49] Since 1994–95, the school has consistently received one of the state's top two ratings, and for the past three years, the school has been rated Exemplary. To receive an Exemplary rating, an elementary school must have at least a 94 percent attendance rate and more than 90 percent of their students (and of each subgroup of students) passing the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS).[50]

47 Since Ogg is the bilingual school for the north side of the district, all bilingual special education students in the north part of Brazosport attend Ogg. Moreover, students from at least one other school's attendance area attend Ogg's self-contained life skills classroom.

48 These figures are drawn from the Texas Education Agency's AEIS website (www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis) and represent the enrollment reported to TEA as of the last Friday in October of each school year.

49 The accountability system rates elementary schools according to their attendance rates and their student performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The four levels of ratings for schools are Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, and Low-Performing.

50 The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is a criterion-referenced test given to students in grades 3 through 8 and grade 10. The test is administered during the spring semester of each school year. In elementary schools, the test measures student achievement in reading and mathematics (for grades 3, 5, and 6) and in reading, writing, and mathematics (for grade 4). Students with disabilities may be exempted from taking the test by a school's Admission, Review, and Dismissal committee, which determines the individual education plan for each student in special education. For more information see the glossary in Appendix A. (Source: Texas Education Agency's AEIS Glossary, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis)

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Table 16: Ogg Students Passing the TAAS*

	1997–1998[51]		1998–1999[52]		1999–2000	
	School	State	School	State	School	State
TAAS Reading	95.4%	87.0%	94.3%	86.5%	97.2%	87.4%
TAAS Writing	96%	87.4%	100%	88.2%	100%	88.2%
TAAS Mathematics	95.5%	84.2%	93.8%	85.7%	95%	87.4%

* Includes all students who participated, including students with disabilities.

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

Students receiving special education services at Ogg also perform well on the TAAS. Over the past two years, these students have performed significantly better than the state average for special education students, despite similar TAAS participation rates.[53]

Table 17: Ogg Special Education Students' Performance and Participationon the TAAS

	1997–1998		1998–1999		1999–2000	
	School	State	School	State	School	State
Performance (% Passing)						
TAAS Reading	56.4%	51.1%	83.3%	66.6%	100%	71.0%
TAAS Writing	35.7%	46.0%	*[54]	62.7%	*	65.6%
TAAS Mathematics	46.2%	46.7%	85%	64.6%	88.9%	71.1%
Participation (% Exempt)[55]	0.4%	5.2%	5.7%	6.9%	9.4% Δ	7.1%

Δ In 1999–2000, fourteen third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students receiving special education services transferred to Ogg. This contributed to the increase in special education exemptions from 1999 to 2000.

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

In addition to its outstanding performance on the state assessments, Ogg Elementary School has received several state and national honors, including Nationally Recognized Title I Distinguished School, 1998–99; Title I Distinguished School, 1997–98, 1998–99, and 1999–2000; and National Blue Ribbon School, 1996–97.

Getting All Students to Achieve High Levels of Success

Underlying Ogg's academic success are high expectations for student achievement. The staff at Ogg express the belief that *all* students can learn, and the teachers, administrators, and support program specialists demonstrate a willingness to do whatever is necessary to help students succeed. A district special education administrator emphasized that these high expectations—both for students and for themselves—are reinforced by the school district and are what set the campus apart from other schools in predominately low-income areas:

> There are no excuses as to why a student cannot be successful. We don't care where they're living, where their family is from originally. That's not important. Our goal is that student. That is well communicated. If you come in and interview in this district, you're going to know that there are high expectations. If you're not willing to go the extra that it takes, this isn't the place. I think people know that. But they also know that we care about kids, and that's real evident [at Ogg], too. They have done wonderful things with some real tough kids.

As the early childhood special education teacher stated, "We just expect [the students] to perform and we make sure that they do. We just work constantly with them and get parental support and achieve it!"

Exactly *what* the staff at Ogg expect their students to achieve is clear to everyone on campus. The teachers at each grade level share a common vision of what their students should learn in class and agree on specific learning objectives in both reading/language arts and mathematics. These objectives are closely aligned to the curriculum standards set forth by the state of Texas and measured by the TAAS. Several teachers at

51 Unadjusted scores as reported by the Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System in 1998 and used for school accountability rating purposes. (Source: www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/98/index.html)

52 Beginning in 1999, results also include special education test takers and Spanish-speaking test takers in grades 3 and 4 on the reading and mathematics portions of the TAAS.

53 According to the Texas Education Agency's AEIS website, although it is the intention to test every student in these grades, there are circumstances under which some students are exempted from the test. Students receiving special education services, for example, may receive an ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal) exemption for every test; and students may receive an LEP (Limited English Proficient) exemption for every test. (Source: www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis)

54 An asterisk (*) indicates that fewer than five students were in the classification.

55 The percentage exempt, as reported by the AEIS, indicates the percentage of students classified as exempt on all three exams.

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Ogg, however, also express expectations for student achievement beyond those mandated by the state. For example, a fifth-grade teacher described her goals for student achievement in reading:

> My goal is that when you end fifth grade you can pick up anything, with maybe the exception of a college textbook, and read it enough to understand what it says, so that by the time you hit intermediate school you can pick up a paper and you know what's going on in the world around you. You can use a book to research anything that you want to find. I want them to be able to basically function almost at an adult level in the reading area by the time they leave my classroom.

Similarly, the kindergarten teachers at Ogg expect their students to achieve at levels beyond their grade. About three-fourths of the students in kindergarten are reading—a skill that the state curriculum standards do not address until the first grade. Teachers at Ogg also expect prekindergarten students to exhibit early literacy skills.

Administrators, teachers, and support staff at Ogg focus on student needs and implement several practices intended to support students. When barriers to learning are identified, these barriers are immediately addressed through the regular education classroom, a team of well-trained support personnel, and a range of flexible programs and services. Only when these resources have been exhausted does the staff at Ogg even consider a student for special education testing and referral.

Making Sure Students Learn

The staff at Ogg have implemented a series of policies and practices to ensure that *all* students learn. These practices place priority on the needs of students, encourage experimentation and collaboration, and allow teachers to focus their energies on instruction and on meeting the individual needs of students. They also support the use of student-, classroom-, and grade-level data to quickly identify barriers to student learning.

Putting the needs of children first

Over the years, the administrators at Ogg have worked to instill on campus the philosophy that children come first. Principal Moore explained:

> We've worn "Children First" pins for probably eight or nine years. The reason we do that is because the philosophy is, you do what's best for kids. Things come up and you look at it and you think, "Well, this might be best for the teacher and not right for the kid." We're going to make our decisions based on what's best for the kids.

Today, "children first" is the operating principle of the school. Teachers and support personnel trust the administration to make decisions based on the best interests of the students, and, in turn, are willing to do so themselves. "Very few people, if you ask them to do something in this school, balk at doing it," explained one support program specialist. She went on to say,

> They are more than willing to do it if they possibly can and that includes coming early, staying late, whatever it takes. Because, like we say, children come first. . . . They're willing to come and give that extra time and extra effort if it'll pull these kids up where they need to be.

According to Principal Moore, this approach to the needs of students and the camaraderie it has engendered have not always existed on campus. It has taken years of concentrated effort to develop. One way that he and his administrative team have encouraged teachers to put children first is by serving as role models. The principal, for example, participates as a tutor in the school's daily Assistance Component/Enrichment program, leads an after-school enrichment program, and makes an effort to work with and get to know every classroom of students on campus. Teachers note that he treats all the kids the same and, through actions and words, expresses the same high expectations for all students.

Another way that the administration models the philosophy of children first is by supporting teachers in their efforts to bring all students to high levels of achievement. Administrators trust teachers to develop their own classroom schedules based on the needs of students, get teachers the materials needed for instruction (such as guided reading books for the early grades), and help clear the way so that teachers can focus on instruction. One fifth-grade teacher noted:

> This is the best school as far as being allowed to do our job and not have to do a lot of extra fluffy stuff. We literally do our job. When our motto says "Children First," that's exactly how we are treated here, and that's how our administration backs us up, is that it's the kid first and . . .

Another fifth-grade teacher chimed in: "Bulletin boards later!"

A willingness to experiment

Consistent with this philosophy of putting children first is the staff's willingness to be creative and flexible in meeting the needs of their students. This openness to experimentation is particularly evident in the way that

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the school handles teaching assignments and in the way that staff work to enrich and accelerate learning.

The administration at Ogg is very good at recognizing and capitalizing on the strengths of its staff and is open to creative teaching assignments, as long as they are in the best interest of students. In the fourth grade, for example, several of the teachers feel particularly effective in specific subject areas. Two of these teachers—one who feels strong in reading and other, in mathematics—not only model instructional methods for other teachers at their grade level but *teach* each others' classes in these core areas. A few years ago, they approached Principal Moore in the middle of the school year with their idea of sharing classes. He agreed. "That's the wonderful part about him," one of the teachers explained. "If you can make it work, then do it!"

Similarly, all the fourth-grade teachers at Ogg participate in a team-taught writing program that takes place between October and February. For an hour each day, the fourth-grade teachers take all of their students to the cafeteria, where they are joined by the special education and Title I teachers. Together, they teach students using curriculum developed by a veteran fourth-grade teacher at the school. When the teacher proposed the idea eight years ago, the administration was skeptical but decided to give it a try. The founder of the fourth-grade writing program proudly described the principal:

> We're lucky enough to have [a principal] that will let you try an idea. He'll always say, "We'll try it your way, but if it doesn't work we're going to go back and try another way." Well, that was all he could do. We only had 75 percent of our kids passing Writing, . . . so he let us try it and our scores went from 75 passing to 90 passing the first year, so that was a pretty good indication we could do something. He's worked with us ever since. He gave us our common planning time where we could plan together and work together, and it changes every year. We change it every year. It will never be set in stone because you get a different group of kids every year.

Another area where the staff exhibit creativity in meeting the needs of students is in their work to enrich and accelerate learning. One example of this is how the school uses its Creative Education Institute (CEI) lab. The lab provides a computer program that helps students develop their processing skills and short- and long-term recall. Since the lab has a limited number of computers, it is generally reserved for students who are experiencing the most difficulty in class, including students who receive special education services. This year, however, the school decided to also use the lab to support its most advanced bilingual students. One of the CEI lab teachers explained:

> Instead of taking the lowest student in that particular group, now we're taking the students that are about ready to exit the bilingual program and need to have more support with English vocabulary. It has been wonderful. . . . The benefit of it is that they are really picking up a lot of vocabulary, and the growth was phenomenal this year for those students.

In addition, several teachers at Ogg enrich the curriculum by providing activities that their students might not otherwise get to experience. A prime example of this is the first-grade unit on Texas, which culminates in a full-day rodeo with live horses, a chuck wagon, barrel races, singing, and other family activities. "You're still doing your reading [and] your language arts," one teacher noted, "but we throw in those extra things also, and I think it makes a big difference."

A focus on improving classroom instruction

The teachers at Ogg spend a lot of time discussing and learning how to improve their classroom instruction. Teachers meet during their common planning periods, at lunchtime, and outside school hours to talk about strategies that work and areas where their students are experiencing difficulty. They feel comfortable asking each other, the school's support program specialists, and other on-campus staff to come into their classrooms to model instruction. The district reading initiative coordinator, who is housed on campus, described a typical situation:

> If a teacher comes and says, "My guided reading is just really not working out, can you help me?" I may go and do a guided reading lesson for them right then. Or we may sit down and problem-solve together and see what they're doing and make some suggestions. Sometimes that's all it takes. A teacher came the other day and said, "I need some help"—this is the kindergarten teacher—"I'm not doing well in my independent writing with my children. I want them to be able to sit down and write by themselves and they're not doing it. I'm not giving good instruction. What am I doing wrong?" We talked a while and I asked, what are you doing, what are the children doing, what can't they do, what can they do, and I gave suggestions, and she went back and said, "Oh, it's wonderful, it's working."
>
> It's constant; they're in and out of my office just constantly.

In addition to the almost daily informal professional development activities that take place on campus, the staff at Ogg participate in formal on- and off-site

training designed to improve instruction. These trainings include presentations on topics such as which objectives students should be able to master at different developmental stages, how to handle behavioral problems in the classroom, how to use data to improve classroom instruction, and what to look for in terms of problems that might require special education services. Whether the professional development activity is held at the local, regional, or state level, the administration tries to make sure that a team of teachers is involved in the training. Principal Moore discussed:

> At one time my philosophy was . . . I would send one fourth-grade teacher, and they would come back and share it with their co-workers. And you think, well, that's a good way to do it. But it doesn't work well because it's hard for that teacher to bring back the enthusiasm, the things they learned, in the same manner that they heard it to their co-workers. So if I have something specific to fourth grade now, I will send all my fourth-grade teachers. Then they as a group . . . they are going to decide whether to do it. That works a lot better.

A recent example of this team approach to professional development is the school's participation in the Developing Literacy First training. The district's reading initiative requires kindergarten, first-, and second-grade teachers to complete 25 hours per year of staff development training. To fulfill this requirement, the teachers at Ogg and the campus-based district reading initiative coordinator decided to embark on an intensive 12-week training program. Everyone who worked with children in prekindergarten through first grade participated in the training—from the classroom teachers, to the support program specialists, to the special education resource teacher. A support program specialist with 25 years of teaching experience explained that the training has equipped the team with common research-based strategies for addressing student needs:

> We were required to read a lot of research articles and things, so that we were able to see why things were taught the way they are—looking at students developmentally, looking at the reading process developmentally, and how we can do different things in the classroom to fit those particular needs, [strategies] that have been researched and found to be successful.

Early identification of problems

At every grade level, the staff at Ogg continuously monitor and assess student progress to ensure that students don't fall behind. In addition to the end-of-year and benchmark testing implemented by the district, the teachers, administrators, and support program personnel at Ogg collect student performance data on a *weekly* basis to quickly identify and address areas where students are having difficulty. This data is used to guide immediate changes in instruction, identify students who could benefit from small group and one-on-one tutoring support, and place students in the proper "pull-out" or support programs.

In the early grades, end-of-year, benchmark, and weekly classroom assessments are used to measure student progress. The district's reading initiative task force recently developed its own end-of-year reading test that meets state requirements for kindergarten, first, and second grades. To get a picture of what their students already know and how they progress over time, however, the staff at Ogg decided also to conduct a pretest at the beginning of the year and a benchmark test in December. Specifically, they use running reading records to determine the accuracy of each student's reading and to pinpoint areas where students are experiencing difficulty. One first-grade teacher explained:

> It's real individualized. It gives us really good information. It's real time consuming but it's really worth it because I can look at a child and say, "She's not using her visual clues enough," or "She's not using her phonetics."

In addition to this benchmark testing, the kindergarten, first-, and second-grade teachers and support program specialists monitor their students' progress on a weekly basis. The classroom teachers use small-group instruction and class work, the CEI lab specialist uses computerized daily reports, and the Title I reading specialist uses weekly reading records to continuously gauge student progress.

The staff at Ogg are equally focused on the early identification of learning problems in the upper grades. Rather than just giving benchmark TAAS tests every nine weeks, for example, the third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade teachers and school administrators test students on specific objectives every one or two weeks. In addition, they get weekly assessment data and examples of student work from the support program specialists. According to the fourth- and fifth-grade teachers, this frequent assessment has several benefits. It shows objectives on which they need to improve their teaching, objectives that their students have mastered, and objectives that will have to be taught again. The frequent assessment also shows teachers on which objective individual students need help, either in the classroom or through tutoring and support programs. A fourth-grade teacher stated:

> We can pinpoint those kids [who are experiencing difficulty]. We have a lot of graphs and charts. We'll look to see who's

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> lowest and then we work with those kids harder to try to get them up to par with the other kids.

The administration at Ogg is very involved in the ongoing analysis of student performance data and in trouble-shooting problems. The assistant principal, for example, helps disaggregate the third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade TAAS data and makes sure that assessment information is available to teachers in a timely fashion. Through this process, the assistant principal gets to know the individual needs of every student. He said, "I can tell you which child missed which question on what day." Together, he and the teachers identify students who are experiencing difficulty and try to figure out what might be contributing to the problem. They check to make sure proper testing procedures were followed, look for patterns within and across classrooms, and talk about the strategies used for particular objectives. Administrators also visit with students who are experiencing difficulty and help facilitate the placement of students in support programs.

Addressing Barriers to Student Learning

The administrators and teachers at Ogg believe that most of the learning difficulties experienced by their students can be addressed through the school's regular education program—the classroom teacher and a team of well-trained support program personnel. As the point people responsible for student learning, the classroom teachers feel comfortable drawing on their own expertise and a range of flexible programs and services to meet the needs of individual students. Only when these resources have been exhausted will a teacher consider referring a child for special education testing. One first-grade teacher explained that such referrals are not taken lightly:

> Labeling the kids special ed is a big deal. I don't think it's something you just [say], "Oh, well you're kind of hard to teach, so . . ." It's a wonderful program and serves its purpose, but it's not anything to be taken lightly. . . . I just think parents depend on us to be professionals and to really try to do what's absolutely best for their child.

Special education referral as the last resort

The expectation that problems students are experiencing should first be addressed through the regular education program is reinforced at the both the district and the campus levels. As a district special education administrator said, "I want the regular education teachers to do everything possible that they can before we identify that child. It should be the last resort." On campus, the principal clearly conveys this message to teachers. A fourth-grade teacher explained:

> There's no way that a new child would move into my room and the next week I'd go ask [the principal] for a [special education referral] booklet because he'd think I'd lost my mind! They're going to get the year to see what they can do, and what you can do with them.

Principal Moore and teachers at Ogg are particularly reluctant to refer children for special education testing at an early age. Moore noted, "Our philosophy is pretty much to not refer students for special education at an early age unless we see a real need. I mean a real, definite need, because . . . we have found that a lot of the problems they're experiencing are just developmental." A first-grade teacher concurred:

> It has to be really severe for me to refer a first grader. I think for me to justify it to [the principal], I can't just go in and say, "This kid's having trouble. I'm going to send him for testing," because we really have to be able to justify it. There's so much developmentally in first grade, there's so much, just their birth month, everything, what they've come from, their home environment. I feel, I think we all do feel a lot of ownership of our kids, and I'd really rather do as much as I can.

"If we see problems early," the assistant principal explained, "we address them in other ways such as class reduction, primary basic skills, pull-out programs, Reading Recovery, reading initiative, interactive writing, anything we can."

A flexible, team approach to addressing problems

When a barrier to student learning is identified, the staff at Ogg know that they can rely on a flexible and well-coordinated team of teaching professionals to quickly address the problem. At the center of this team is the regular education classroom teacher. The teachers at Ogg feel good about their instructional skills and work hard to meet the needs of students in their classroom. At the same time, however, they recognize that some of their students' learning needs can be better addressed outside their classroom—by another teacher or by one of the school's many support programs and services.

Classroom teachers often turn to each other for help with students who are experiencing difficulty. In addition to asking other teachers for advice, some of the teachers at Ogg send students to other classrooms and even to other grade levels for help with particular skills. For example, a kindergarten teacher sends one

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of her students to the prekindergarten class "for a little bit, [to] get some of the skills that he's lacking in that area." A first-grade teacher explained how one of her students came to receive help from the teacher of the at-risk kindergarten class:

> I just saw that she needed some very basic things that she apparently missed out on last year, and I thought that might be a good idea. [I] discussed it with [the teacher of the at-risk kindergarten class], and she thought it was an excellent idea and was willing to do it.

Working together, these two teachers have seen improvement in the student. "Part of that is that she's beginning to mature a little bit," the first-grade teacher explained, "but part of it is that she is able to really function in [that teacher's] room, whereas she would be floundering in another atmosphere."

Several of the teachers on campus talk about the importance of having different instructors teach the same objective to their students, especially to students who are falling behind. One of the ways that the school promotes this practice is through its Assistance Component/Enrichment (ACE) program. Every day between 12:30 and 1:00, the teachers, administrators, counselor, and support program specialists on campus conduct special tutoring and enrichment activities. Through ACE, students who are experiencing problems with particular objectives can receive short-term support in a small-group setting. A fifth-grade teacher described the benefits of this strategy:

> They hear the same objectives with different words from four different people. We hit them from all these different directions. Sometimes you say it and it doesn't click, and then I say the exact same thing and the light bulb goes on.

Recognizing these benefits, the teachers at Ogg also turn to peer tutors, tutors from higher grade levels, tutors from the high school, and to the school's after-school tutoring program for help with students who are experiencing difficulty. Because the school monitors student progress on a weekly basis, these interventions can be focused on the immediate needs of students.

Another place the teachers turn for help is to the school's regular education support programs and services. Structured to address barriers to learning, these services include:

- *Primary Basic Skills (PBS) Program*—A full-time specialist provides kindergarten, first-, and second-grade teachers with rapid intervention support. She explained, "The purpose of the program is to take a child who is having difficulty with a concept and pull him back up as quickly as possible in line with the other children in their class." Every week, teachers tell her which students they want her to work with and on what skills. She can accommodate six students at a time but generally works with fewer.
- *Creative Education Institute (CEI) computer lab*—Two half-time specialists run the CEI lab, which has a sensory integrated computer program that helps students in kindergarten through fifth grade with their processing skills and short- and long-term recall. After testing to determine how a student learns best (verbalization, listening, etc.) and what is his or her current instructional level, the program is individualized to the needs of each student. The specialists further adjust the program, as needed, based on the system's daily student progress reports. Lab resources are limited, so the school has decided to reserve the program for students who are experiencing the most difficulty as measured by test scores and for students who can use extra support as they prepare to leave the bilingual education program. The program has been so successful that the district special education director has asked that students who need the service be allowed to stay in the program for two years.
- *Classroom reduction specialist*—The school applied for and received classroom reduction funds for use in kindergarten through third grade. The staff at Ogg decided to focus these resources on students experiencing the most difficulty in class. Using student assessment data, the school identified their ten lowest-scoring first-grade students in reading. The classroom reduction specialist works with these students in the morning. In the afternoon, she works with second-grade students who need help with mathematics.
- *Title I reading specialists*—Two Title I reading specialists serve the students at Ogg—a full-time specialist for kindergarten through second grade and a half-time specialist for third through fifth grade. Again, their efforts are focused on areas where problems have been identified. The specialist serving kindergarten through second grade, for example, is focusing on the kindergarten and first grades this year because, after a lot of testing, this is where the school saw the most need. In this case, the specialist works with the entire kindergarten class. Usually, though, teachers ask the specialists to work with particular children.

According to staff at the school, these programs and services are invaluable in addressing barriers to student learning. Part of what makes them so successful is the high degree of collaboration between classroom teachers and the support specialists. They are in frequent communication about the needs of students, how individual students are progressing, and what teaching strategies work with particular students. A

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CEI lab specialist notes that this communication and cooperation is ongoing:

> Pretty much weekly we get together with our teachers to make sure that they understand what's going on in here, and to let them know how their students are progressing. There is just constant communication between the teachers, ourselves, and the administrators—at all times. If we see a child that's just not performing as well, we contact the teachers to find out if they're noticing the same characteristics in that child, and see what changes can be made. Or we contact the parent, send letters to parents to find out what's going on. They also receive the data that the teachers receive on their child to let them know how they're progressing in the lab.

An individualized approach

Armed with weekly student performance data and their own experience with each student, the teachers at Ogg take a multifaceted and individualized approach to student learning problems. Solutions are tailored to particular students and often more than one strategy is employed. The following two examples illustrate this approach:

- One of the first-grade teachers had a student who was transferred from another school. She noticed that he was having trouble with reading and that his self-esteem was very low. She tutored him after school and looked for ways to motivate him to read. At first, she used rewards of candy, but she knew that he had to want to do it for himself. So she tried an experiment. "I looked at the books and said, 'How about your taking that book home and bringing it tomorrow and reading it to the class?' He read only a few pages to the class, but the kids clapped and said he was doing great. The next day, he asked if he could do it again." Now the student's reading skills have improved and he is working hard in class.
- One of the second-grade teachers had a student who was struggling in class but enjoyed mathematics. The teacher immediately put the student in the classroom reduction program for mathematics. He has done well in this program and "it really makes him feel successful." For reading, the teacher sent the student to the CEI lab and worked with him herself in a small-group setting. "He's gotten a lot of help from everybody," she explained.

At all grade levels, it's not unusual for students who are experiencing difficulty to receive double and triple doses of instruction—through tutoring, the classroom teacher, and the school's support program specialists—as well as counseling support, as needed.

In addition, the staff at Ogg try to engage the support of parents and family members in addressing learning problems. They keep parents abreast of their child's progress by sending home frequent progress reports, test results, and notes, and through personal contact with parents in the hallways and at parent-teacher conferences. Moreover, several of the teachers provide parents with ideas about what they can do to reinforce what happens in the classroom. Where available, family members are seen as a great resource in bringing up the student who has fallen behind. At the same time, however, the teachers at Ogg don't use lack of parental involvement—and even home lives that are detrimental to student learning—as excuses for poor performance.

A formal prereferral process

Last year, the school district required all campuses to develop a formal process to ensure that schools were looking at all options before they initiated special education referral and placement. In response, the staff at Ogg created what is generally referred to as the Core Team. This team includes the principal, the assistant principal, and one other person. Depending on the student, this person could be the speech therapist, the counselor, or one of the support program specialists.

Consistent with the belief that special education referral is the last resort, the team reviews what strategies the teacher has tried to help the student succeed. They examine samples of student work and discuss other ways of meeting the student's needs through the regular education program. According to the campus diagnostician, the team may decide that more options should be tried before referral for special education testing, including whether the student might benefit from more modifications in the regular education classroom (under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973[56]).

Identifying Students in Need of Special Education Services

Once the school has tried everything it can to help a student through its regular education program, the administration at Ogg give the classroom teacher a

[56] Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and its implementing regulations in 34 CFR Part 104 require that districts ensure that children are placed in programs based upon their individual needs, with the least restrictive environment considerations.

special education referral booklet to complete. A time-intensive process, completion of the booklet requires input from medical personnel and parents, and meticulous documentation of student performance as measured by test scores and work samples. It is this package of information that the school district uses to inform diagnostic testing. The decision whether or not to place the student in special education services is made at the initial Admission, Review, and Dismissal, or ARD, meeting. Throughout, the administration works to ensure a participatory process where language isn't a barrier to appropriate special education placement.

Making Sure Language Isn't a Barrier

As the bilingual school for the north side of Brazosport Independent School District, Ogg takes special measures to ensure that language barriers do not lead to inappropriate placement in special education. Before special education testing, the school reviews the student's home language survey to see what language is used most often at home. If Spanish is checked, a test is given to determine the child's dominant language. According to the school diagnostician, assumptions about language proficiency are not made based on the student's surname or whether or not the student is placed in the school's bilingual program. If a student's dominant language is Spanish, the district's bilingual diagnostician and speech therapist administer the tests in Spanish. Spanish versions of intellectual functioning tests are used.

Similarly, the school works to ensure that Spanish-speaking parents are given the fullest opportunity to express themselves at ARD meetings. The bilingual assessment personnel provide copies of handouts in Spanish and can speak with parents in Spanish, if needed. In addition, a number of staff members can serve as interpreters for parents, including teachers of the school's bilingual classes. The resource or Developmental Learning Cluster teacher is also certified in bilingual education.

A Participatory ARD Process

At Ogg, the principal or the assistant principal chair all ARD meetings. In addition to the chairperson, the initial ARD team is comprised of the parent, the diagnostician, and the classroom teacher. If the student is in the CEI lab, the lab specialist may also accompany the teacher to present data on the child. Beyond that, attendance depends on the particular needs of the student. If the student is experiencing a learning disability, then the special education teacher will attend. If speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, music therapy, or counseling are under consideration, then professionals in these areas will attend. Together, the group discusses what can be done to ensure the student's success in the classroom.

According to Principal Moore, his role is to set the tone for the meeting and make sure that all participants have an opportunity to express their opinions and concerns, especially parents. As the assistant principal explained, the biggest issue he is concerned with at the meeting is

> . . . that we have the proper educational plan in place and that the parent understands that we're all working toward one common goal, which is the success of their child educationally. The parent needs to feel that they are a part of that team. We're all part of the team. If they just feel like they're sitting there listening to what we're telling them, [then] we're not getting our mission across.

According to the parents interviewed, the school is fulfilling this mission. They feel that educational plans put in place at ARD meetings are mutual decisions (of the parents and the school) for the benefit of their children. Moreover, since they and the classroom teacher had been talking about their children's progress for some time, the need for special education support was not a surprise. The diagnostician explained, "Most of the time when [parents] come to the meetings, and I go over my evaluation, they're ready to place their child in the program."

At the initial ARD, a lot of information is shared. The diagnostician presents the results of the special education tests, answers questions from the group, and presents her recommendations. The classroom teacher presents samples of the student's work, an overview of how the student is performing, and the objectives that need more attention. The teacher also discusses educational strategies that seem to work for the student. Parents are invited to share their observations and questions.

Generally, the staff at Ogg prepare a draft individualized education program, or IEP, for the student before the initial ARD. Sometimes this draft program is sent home ahead of time with the meeting notice. For students diagnosed with a learning disability, the special education teacher prepares the draft IEP with input from the diagnostician and the regular education classroom teacher. Most disagreements among staff are hashed out before the ARD. A CEI lab specialist explained:

> We . . . talk about it so we can kind of go into that meeting with a plan A, a plan B already set up. I think it's important to not only be agreeable when we're in those meetings, but I think it's important to show the parents that we do support one another

> as professionals and as teachers here on this campus, and that we're all together to work for that child. . . . Then with the parent, then we can discuss and talk about it. Sometimes [the plans] get changed a little bit because the parent has another insight that they bring in to us from home. We can look at that and then make another evaluation. But at least we're all right there. It works pretty well.

Ensuring the Success of Students With Disabilities

The teachers and administrators at Ogg view special education as one more way to individualize instruction and provide students with the support they need be successful. Through special education, they say, children can work at their own pace and level, and receive more one-on-one support in a small-group setting. Across the board, the staff at Ogg and at the district feel that the purpose of special education is to support the regular education program and to help students achieve to the best of their ability. As Principal Moore observed:

> I really view our classroom teachers as . . . the meat of our meal. I'm a support; the bilingual program is a support; special education teachers are support; Title I is a support system to provide kids the extra help or just to meet their special needs. A classroom teacher can do a lot of things; some things they can't because of the limitations or the number of students in their class, or the specific disability a student might have or a special need. . . . [It's about] meeting the needs of kids.

"The whole point of special education is to catch a child up, get them on grade level, dismiss them from the program, and move on with their education," summarized the assistant principal. To meet this goal and ensure the success of students with disabilities, the staff at Ogg work to integrate students into the regular education program and monitor and assess student progress. Not content with the status quo, they are also exploring ways to improve the quality of the special education services they provide.

Range of Special Education Services

The Special Education Division at Brazosport Independent School District feels that it is important to keep as many students as possible on their home campus. "The school is better equipped to take care of their own kids because they know the parent," explained one district administrator. In keeping with this philosophy, Ogg provides a range of special education services. As the bilingual school for the north side of Brazosport Independent School District, Ogg ensures that special education services are delivered in the home language of the student.

- *An early education program* serves children ages 3 to 5 on a half-day basis. Students are identified through the district's early childhood screening program. At the time of our visit in spring 2000, about 12 students were receiving early childhood services. Students in the program generally progress into the full-day, at-risk kindergarten classroom.
- *A Developmental Learning Cluster (DLC) or resource classroom* serves children in first through fifth grades. Students who receive DLC services leave the regular education classroom for support in specific content areas such as reading, language arts, and mathematics. The amount of time spent in DLC and the content areas covered vary by student, as specified by each student's individualized education program. At the time of our visit, the DLC teacher and her aide were working with about 38 students and were monitoring the progress of about nine additional students. The DLC program saw a large influx of special education transfer students this year, especially in the fourth grade, where the number of special education students doubled as students moved to Ogg from other schools.
- *A self-contained life skills classroom* serves students with the most severe disabling conditions. Due to the small number of students receiving these services districtwide, the program serves students from the attendance area of at least one other school. At the time of our visit, a majority of the six students in this classroom were from Ogg's attendance area.
- *Speech and other special education support services.* The largest special education support service on campus is Speech. At the time of our visit 62 students were receiving speech therapy. District personnel were also providing occupational, physical, and music therapy on campus.

Special education services for students with limited proficiency in English

Ogg provides bilingual education for all students with limited proficiency in English who live in the north side of the district. The bilingual teacher participates on the ARD committee that develops a student's individual education program, and meets regularly with the special education teacher to monitor progress on the IEP. In addition, the Language Proficiency Assessment

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Committee[57] monitors IEP progress at least twice a year. Three times a year, the LPAC monitors students who have been exited from the bilingual program to ensure their success in the regular education program. This frequent monitoring, coupled with the school's collection of achievement data on a weekly basis, ensures that bilingual students who are struggling will get immediate support, either in regular education, bilingual education, special education, or all three.

Ogg's staff have instituted some actions to ensure the success of students with limited proficiency in English who are slated to exit the bilingual program. One is the use of the CEI lab to help build their vocabulary in English, and another is to exit students who have been in bilingual education since kindergarten at the end of second grade. This ensures that students have a full year in the regular education program before taking the English TAAS writing test. The school staff continue to monitor students who have been exited from bilingual education for a full year and provide extra assistance to students who need it.

The frequent monitoring ensures that students can quickly receive the help they need. For example, the LPAC monitored one student closely because he had just transferred to Ogg and had recently been exited from bilingual education. During the first monitoring period, the student was performing well in the regular education classroom. However, in December the student failed an assessment in reading, alerting the assistant principal, who chairs the LPAC, to a potential problem. When the student continued to struggle, the assistant principal asked that the student be tested to determine if the cause of the problem was language. When the test indicated both limited proficiency in English and a possible disability, the student was tested in his home language for eligibility for special education services. The student is now more successful in the bilingual education program with support from the special education teacher.

"They're Ogg Kids First": Integration of Students into the General Education Program

The staff at Ogg try to make sure that students who receive special education services are treated as Ogg students first. As they do with all students who receive services outside the classroom, the teachers at Ogg feel responsible for the success of students who are placed in special education. They keep in touch with the special education and speech teachers about the progress of their students, maintain contact with parents, and refer special education students to other regular education support services, as needed.

Special education students at Ogg are involved in a series of regular education support programs and services. Everyone participates in the ACE program, and students who need additional support also participate in after-school tutoring, the CEI lab, and other regular education support programs. All fourth-grade students participate in the fourth-grade writing program, where the special education teacher is available to provide support as needed. As the assistant principal noted:

> **You may have been diagnosed with a learning disability, but you're a student at T. W. Ogg Elementary in BISD, and you will become successful. There's no ands, ifs, or buts about it. You will work just as hard—it's not a crutch. It's a tool. We will just give you whatever it takes for you to become successful. If it's two hours of math, if it's PBS, CEI, tutorials, whatever it takes.**

One fourth-grade teacher said, "We just expect them to succeed—*all* of them."

In addition to involving students in the regular education program, the staff at Ogg try to make sure that students in the special education program feel welcome and appreciated at school. The administrators, counselor, and nurse pay attention to their special education students. They know their names, speak to them in hallways and in class, buddy them up with students who can help them, and know how they are progressing at school. According to parents, the staff at Ogg have created an environment where students feel accepted. The parent of a physically disabled student explained:

> **I don't know if it's taught or what, but the kids do not make fun of other kids. I don't have that problem with [my son] that I know of. He would tell me, I would think. For the most part all the kids surround him and love him. He's just like any of the other ones. They don't expect anything different.**

The parent of two students who have received special education services at Ogg commented, "I think the kids feel loved here. I can't put it any more plainly than that."

Like their children, the parents interviewed feel comfortable at Ogg and trust that the school is doing what it can to make students successful. Many of them have experience with other schools, and were not sat-

[57] The Texas Education Code requires each school district to establish a Language Proficiency Assessment Committee composed of a professional bilingual educator, a transitional language educator, a parent of a student with limited proficiency in English, and a campus administrator. The committee must recommend the most appropriate placement and monitor the progress of students with limited proficiency in English.

isfied with the way those schools handled their children's education. These parents felt that they could voice their concerns and that people at Ogg would listen and respond. "In a lot of the other schools, you basically have to call *I want an ARD*,"[58] one parent explained. "Here all I have to do is talk with the teacher. She calls me. I call her. If we see a problem we try to tackle it together."

Monitoring and Assessing Student Progress

As is true for all students at Ogg, the progress of students with disabilities is constantly monitored through frequent teacher observations and the ongoing collection and analysis of student performance data. This data is used not only to guide instruction but also to assess whether or not the child is ready to leave the special education program.

In general, student performance on the TAAS is used as the proving ground for dismissal from special education. In other words, did the student take TAAS on grade level and pass? If exempted from taking the TAAS, students are often given the test administered to their grade the year before (a release test). This provides both the school and parents with an accurate picture of how the student is performing compared to other students of the same age. However, teachers at Ogg don't feel that they have to wait for the end-of-year testing to initiate the dismissal process. One teacher explained, "If I felt I had one right now that we could take out, all I'd have to do is call an ARD and talk to the parents." Another teacher added, "Getting them out is a whole lot easier than getting them in."

The parents of students in the special education program keep abreast of their children's progress and report seeing improvements. One mother noted:

> **I can see the difference. She was struggling a lot, especially in reading. And now she'll get a book and she feels a lot more comfortable reading than before. She would always come across little words that you would think that she would know and she didn't. And now it's a lot better. I don't see her struggling as much as she was.**

The parents interviewed recognized that the staff at the school have high expectations for their children and are doing what they can to help their children to succeed.

Looking for Ways to Improve

While proud of the achievement of their students, administrators at the school and the district are looking for ways to improve the quality of special education services at Ogg. Principal Moore is looking at alternative instructional programs that would allow students more time in the regular education classroom. And the district is launching professional development training to improve special education classroom instruction and prepare special education teachers for upcoming changes to the state accountability system. These efforts are not lost on parents. When asked what lesson other schools should take from Ogg, one father said:

> **It's like the commercial here: they earn it. They do it the old-fashioned way. They don't fake it. What I've noticed too is that they're always learning, going at other ways and finding ways of doing it better. They don't just sit on their haunches . . . they're always looking for a better way.**

[58] The Admissions, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee in Texas is analogous to the Individualized Education Plan committee in other states.

Lora B. Peck Elementary School

Houston Independent School District
Houston, Texas

1998–1999 School Year

Student Enrollment	324
Attendance Rate	95.3%
Grades Served	EE–5

Demographics

African American	67%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0%
Hispanic	31.2%
Native American	0%
White	1.9%
Limited English Proficiency	25.3%
Mobility	25.9%
Low Income (Free or Reduced-Price Lunch)	96%
Special Education Enrollment	4.0%

Performance

1998–1999 Texas Accountability Rating	Acceptable
1990–2000 Texas Accountability Rating	Recognized

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Lora B. Peck Elementary School

Houston Independent School District
Houston, Texas

School Background

Peck is one of 186 elementary schools in the Houston Independent School District, the seventh largest public school system in the United States. Located on the south side of Houston, Peck is surrounded by a mixture of small businesses, low-income apartment complexes, run-down rental houses, and older but well-kept single-family homes. Although bordered by several busy streets, the campus of Peck is calm and well maintained. The buildings are freshly decorated in a red, white, and blue color scheme, and the classrooms open to courtyards planted with grass, flowers, and trees. Covered pathways protect students from the sun and rain as they move between classes, and the adjoining park provides students with a place to run and play. Once riddled with behavior problems and poor academic performance, Peck Elementary School is now a campus with a growing record of success.

Population Served

An extremely high percentage of Peck's students are from low-income backgrounds—96 percent of its student population is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch—and 25.3 percent are identified as having limited proficiency in English. Sixty-seven percent of the student population is African American; 31.2 percent Latino; and 1.9 percent white. Unlike many high poverty urban elementary schools, Peck has a low percentage of students who receive special education services. At the time of our visit in spring 2000, the school was providing special education services to 11 students—3 girls and 8 boys. In fact, the school's special education enrollment figures have been well below the state average for some time.

Table 18: Peck Special Education Enrollment[59]

1997–1998		1998–1999		1999–2000	
School	State	School	State	School	State
6.6%	12.0%	4%	12.1%	4.9%	12.1%

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

The special education enrollment figures include students who receive speech therapy and special education services in a "resource" setting. They do not include all of the students in Peck's attendance area who receive special education services through the district. A small number of students who need early childhood special education, for example, receive that support at a nearby school.

Special Features and Programs

Since 1998, Peck has participated in Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams),[60] a program that provides college scholarships and dollars to support instruction, behavior management, family services, and community involvement. At Peck, components of the program include Move-It Math and the Success for All reading initiative, the Consistency Management Cooperative Discipline plan, a Communities in Schools program, and a Family Support Team. The goal of Project GRAD is to provide cost-effective, research-based solutions to the needs of schools in urban areas. In addition, Peck has a bilingual regular education program that serves prekindergarten to fifth-grade students and a special education resource classroom that students attend for individualized help with reading/language arts and mathematics.

Academic Performance

In 1999–2000, Peck achieved a Recognized rating in the state accountability system.[61] During that year, Peck students performed significantly better than the state average on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) subtests in reading and writing, and roughly equivalent to the state average in

59 These figures are drawn from the Texas Education Agency's AEIS website (www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis) and represent the enrollment reported to TEA as of the last Friday in October of each school year.

60 Project GRAD was started by James L. Ketelsen, former CEO of Tenneco, Inc., in the Houston ISD and has been replicated in at least four other cities.

61 The accountability system rates elementary schools according to their attendance rates and their student performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The four levels of ratings for schools are Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, and Low-Performing.

mathematics.[62] For a school that was rated Low-Performing in 1995, Peck's performance over the past three years is particularly impressive.

Table 19: Peck Students Passing the TAAS*

	1997-1998[63]		1998-1999[64]		1999-2000	
	School	State	School	State	School	State
TAAS Reading	95.3%	87.0%	76.3%	86.5%	95.1%	87.4%
TAAS Writing	100%	87.4%	100%	88.2%	100%	88.2%
TAAS Mathematics	95.3%	84.2%	81.3%	85.7%	87.2%	87.4%

* Includes all students who participated, including students with disabilities.

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

Beginning in the 1998-99 school year, Texas required that the scores of special education students who take the TAAS be counted in determining school ratings. The implementation of this new regulation was the probable cause of a statewide increase in the percentage of special education students exempted from the TAAS, from 5.2 percent in 1998, to 6.9 percent in 1999.[65] Contrary to this trend, Peck's special education exemption rates actually decreased over the past three years.

In fact, very few students at Peck are exempted from taking the TAAS. In 1998-99 and 1999-2000, no students were exempted due to limited proficiency in English, and fewer than the state average were exempted due to special education considerations. This practice is reinforced by the district, which announced to principals in the fall of 1998 that no student—including students with limited proficiency in English who entered the school in the third, fourth, and fifth grades—was to be excluded from the assessment unless it was absolutely necessary.

The following chart shows the percentage of Peck students who have been exempted from TAAS over the past three years. The chart also includes the TAAS passing rate for students receiving special education services. Because the number of students involved is so small, however, some information is not reported by the Texas Education Agency.

Table 20: Peck Special Education Students' Performance and Participation on the TAAS

	1997-1998		1998-1999		1999-2000	
	School	State	School	State	School	State
Performance (% Passing)						
TAAS Reading	80%	51.1%	50%	66.6%	*[66]	71.0%
TAAS Writing	-	46.0%	-	62.7%	-	65.6%
TAAS Mathematics	53.8%	46.7%	57.1	64.6%	*	71.1%
Participation (% Exempt)[67]	7.8%	5.2%	5.1%	6.9%	5.4%	7.1%

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis

Peck has received local and national recognition for its academic improvement efforts. It was one of five schools recognized for outstanding performance by the National Alliance of Black School Educators and one of ten schools recognized for their reading initiatives by Houston Independent School District. The U.S. Department of Education highlighted the school in a special report about high performing, high poverty schools, and staff at the school have been invited to share the story of Peck's success at numerous conferences and institutes.

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62 The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is a criterion-referenced test given to students in grades 3 through 8 and grade 10. The test is administered during the spring semester of each school year. In elementary schools, the test measures student achievement in reading and mathematics (for grades 3, 5, and 6) and in reading, writing, and mathematics (for grade 4). Students with disabilities may be exempted from taking the test by a school's Admission, Review, and Dismissal committee, which determines the individual education plan for each student in special education. For more information see the glossary in Appendix A. (Source: Texas Education Agency's AEIS Glossary, www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis)

63 Unadjusted scores as reported by the Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System in 1998 and used for school accountability rating purposes. (Source: www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/98/index.html)

64 Beginning in 1999, results also include special education test takers and Spanish-speaking test takers in grades 3 and 4 on the reading and mathematics portions of the TAAS.

65 According to the Texas Education Agency's AEIS website, although it is the intention to test every student in these grades, there are circumstances under which some students are exempted from the test. Students receiving special education services, for example, may receive an ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal) exemption for every test; and students may receive an LEP (Limited English Proficient) exemption for every test. (Source: www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis)

66 An asterisk (*) indicates that fewer than five students were in the classification.

67 The percentage exempt, as reported by the AEIS, indicates the percentage of students classified as exempt on all three exams.

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Getting All Students to Achieve High Levels of Success

The students at Peck have not always performed well academically. When Principal LaWanna Goodwin joined the campus in June 1995, the school had received the lowest rating in the Texas accountability system. Only 23.3 percent[68] of Peck's students had passed all three portions of the TAAS (reading, writing, and mathematics), and tensions were high among teachers, administrators, and parents.

As described in the 1999 Department of Education report *Hope for Urban Education*,[69] Peck's transformation from a low-performing to a high performing school in just three years was the result of a series of efforts aimed at building a team, changing the school climate, improving academic instruction, strengthening parent and community relations, and creating opportunities for individuals to assume leadership roles. Today, the staff at Peck is proud of their accomplishments but not content to rest on their laurels. As Principal Goodwin related,

> **Until we have 100 percent of our students performing successfully on standardized tests, and until we get each child to go as far as they can, then and only then will I be satisfied. So [we] probably never will be completely satisfied. We'll just continue to work, to refine, to make things better, to do a better job of training teachers, [and] to keep abreast of the newest and most recent strategies and techniques that have proven to be successful in working with kids.**

The teachers, administrators, and support personnel at Peck continuously look for ways to help students learn and to address barriers to student progress. As the mathematics facilitator explained, "[We're] always working. It just never stops. We just try to do as much as we possibly can to help the kids."

Making Sure Students Learn

When Principal Goodwin first assumed the task of turning around the school's performance, she asked herself what she would want for her own child. What she would want, she decided, was a clean and inviting campus where the teachers collaborate and maximize their instructional time. Today, Peck is just that. Students file quietly through the halls to classrooms adorned with student work; teachers collaborate, within and across grade levels, to help students succeed in the classroom; and the school has implemented a series of programs and practices intended to make the most of students' time in the classroom.

Collaboration and shared responsibility for student achievement

The staff at Peck work together as a team to meet the educational needs of students. Teachers take responsibility not only for the students in their classroom but for *all* students on campus. They meet in cross-grade-level teams to troubleshoot areas where students are experiencing difficulty; team teach with teachers across multiple grade-levels; and tutor children in other grades to help them master specific objectives. As one first-grade teacher explained:

> **We all work as a team, and we—when I say that, I mean, a first-grade teacher—if push comes to shove, may have to tutor a fourth- or fifth-grade student when it comes to bringing them up to [their] academic potential. . . . We all work together to make sure [that] the children are on target [and] learning.**

A great example of this team approach to learning can be found in the upper grades. Teachers of the third, fourth, and fifth grades broke the mathematics curriculum down into sections and each teacher (including the mathematics facilitator) took responsibility for teaching a specific set of objectives. The teachers also looked at the results of student assessments to determine exactly where students were experiencing problems. Students then rotated to different classrooms based on their own individual areas of instructional need.

Beyond the regular education teachers and support personnel, the entire staff at Peck is involved in meeting the academic goals of the campus. "Everyone on this campus instructs," the Title I instructor explained, "and that literally means the secretary to the custodians." The physical education teacher and the Communities in Schools project manager, for example, tutor students in reading, and the principal meets with students individually to discuss their progress in class.

In a similar fashion, everyone on campus manages student behavior. The campus has a behavior management plan, and two teachers are trained to help others implement the plan in the classroom. Teachers talk about how they try to follow the plan and feel it is

[68] The state average for 1994-95 was 60.7 percent.

[69] The report is available online at http://www.ed.gov/pubs/urbanhope.

their duty to enforce and reward proper behavior with any student that they encounter in the halls.

According to staff at Peck, the school's team approach to teaching and behavior management has improved the school's ability to help students learn—especially students who are experiencing difficulty in class. It has provided teachers with strategies for addressing the individual needs of students and allowed staff to build on each other's instructional strengths. Principal Goodwin observed:

> If we don't have enough strategies to reach this child, then we talk with a team member who we feel is successful, and we try some of their strategies. Then if the team member doesn't have [a strategy that works] we throw it out on the table and say, "What do you have that worked in the past for a child with this type of behavior or this kind of learning problem?"

The principal has implemented several programs and practices that support collaboration on campus. She has provided teachers with the opportunity to work together during common planning periods and encouraged collaboration by grouping multiple grade-levels into teams. Thus, the first- and second-grade teachers meet together two times a week under the guidance of one team leader. Another factor that has influenced collaboration on campus, according to teachers, is Peck's participation in a district initiative that includes the Success for All (SFA) reading initiative. Through the initiative, everyone gets to work with and know students outside of their own classroom.

Every morning, the entire campus spends the first 90 minutes of class focused on reading. The school's teachers, teacher aides, and support program personnel lead small reading groups. The groups are organized by students' reading ability. The special education teacher, for example, leads a group of students who test at the second-grade level. Through the program, the teachers come to know students across campus. As the reading specialist stated,

> It's not just that you know your homeroom class; you know other kids and you can meet their needs in a lot of different ways. We work together as a team and we can collaborate and get together during planning times or when we have SFA meetings, and see how the kids are moving along and compare notes as to where they were at the beginning, as to where they are now. . . . So we're real knowledgeable about all of the kids as opposed to just one group of kids.

This shared knowledge enhances collaboration and, in turn, the school's efforts to help students learn.

Maximizing instructional time

The staff at Peck have worked to maximize their instructional time with students. They have a shared curriculum that helps teachers maintain a common instructional timeline, encourages the use of multiple strategies for helping students learn, and enables teachers to instruct to the level of individual students. They also have clearly established objectives for student achievement and frequently assess each student's progress toward these objectives. This information is used to tailor instruction to the needs of individual students. Maximizing instruction, however, begins with good student-teacher matches.

Principal Goodwin personally schedules all of the students on campus. In doing so, she tries to match students with teachers who will get the most out of the student academically. Throughout the year, she gets to know the students and their families. She becomes familiar with the students' academic progress and needs. If she has a student who she knows is a bit mischievous, for example, Principal Goodwin matches that student with a teacher who provides a more structured learning environment. She also talks with the teacher who is going to work with the student and shares what she knows. She explained:

> One example might be, "This student is really a good student, Miss Jackson, [he or she] has a lot of potential, but you're gonna have to *puuulll* from this child. . . . This child is not going to voluntarily give you his or her best."

Knowing these things ahead of time, she believes, gives teachers an edge. "When I look at all of that and make a decision about who will be their next year's teacher," she commented, "it proves to be successful during the next school year."

In the classroom, the teachers at Peck all work from the same curriculum programs in reading (Success For All) and mathematics (Move-It Math). The programs place emphasis on instruction that fits the level and learning style of students and provide teachers with multiple strategies for helping student progress. In reading, for instance, all of the students on campus are grouped based on their reading ability and then moved to new groups as their reading improves. On any given day, a second-grade-level group might engage in 20 minutes of listening comprehension activities, followed by a series of questions designed to gauge comprehension, work in pairs, and one-on-one interaction with the teacher. During the reading block, the school assigns additional staff to provide reading instruction. This arrangement makes the teacher-student ratio much smaller, encouraging and allowing more individual instruction.

The mathematics program also gives students several approaches to learning new material, beginning

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with concrete and pictorial examples before moving on to approaches that are more abstract. As the mathematics facilitator related, "We'll probably give them three or four different approaches to multiplication before they actually start doing the problem-solving end of it." Through the program, teachers introduce mathematics concepts at an early age. In prekindergarten and kindergarten classes, for example, teachers use strategies like "tap and tally" and manipulative materials to help students learn to count and to introduce concepts like division. Similarly, the first-grade teachers teach their students to skip count by 10s and other strategies, using methods that, as one teacher commented, "make multiplication simpler and fun."

Importantly, the teachers at Peck are not expected to master all of these teaching strategies on their own. Drawing, in large part, on the strengths of particular teachers at the school, the principal has organized a team to help teachers with the core content areas. With two classroom teachers as facilitators in reading and a coordinator of mathematics, the team provides teachers with instructional resources, one-on-one training and support, and help with monitoring the progress of students on specific objectives. They also sometimes team-teach with instructors. In addition, the school has identified one teacher to serve as the campus science specialist. This teacher provides most of the school's science instruction, allowing the classroom teachers to focus on other areas of instruction and the school to provide a better science program. In addition to this support, teachers receive 45 hours per year of professional development training through the district.

The staff at Peck also maximize instruction by targeting areas in which students are experiencing the most difficulty. The administrators and teachers at Peck continuously monitor student performance by conducting eight-week assessments in reading and by using instructional software correlated to the state curriculum standards to regularly monitor student progress. The district administers three separate TAAS benchmarks and the Stanford 9 test. Teachers use data from these tests, along with their own assessments of student progress in class, to determine what objectives to emphasize, brainstorm appropriate instructional strategies, and identify students who might need additional small-group tutoring or support. One fourth-grade teacher noted:

> We sit as a team with [the principal] and go through each child . . . where their weaknesses and strengths are, and what we can do to help them.

In addition to using this information to learn about students, teachers use this information to learn about themselves. Another fourth-grade teacher, for example, noted how the assessments showed that she needed improvement in teaching TAAS objective number 13 in mathematics—"reasonableness." Knowing that most of her students failed on this section, she sought out advice and resources from the fourth-grade team. Now, she noted, her students' scores are "almost perfect" on that objective.

Addressing Barriers to Student Learning

The staff at Peck take a proactive approach to problems that students experience in the classroom. They look at ways to modify, intensify, and tailor instruction to the needs of the student; try to engage the support of parents to reinforce classroom learning at home; and are willing to make difficult fiscal and staffing changes to help students succeed academically. Referral for special education testing is considered only after teachers have exhausted all other options. As the district diagnostician noted, "The referral process here is the very last resort."

Pooling resources to meet student needs

When a student experiences difficulty in the classroom, the staff at Peck immediately look for ways to bring the student up to grade level. In some cases, the teachers at Peck modify their strategies in the classroom to meet the needs of the student. They pair the student with peers who are performing well, spend more one-on-one time with the student, provide positive reinforcement, break assignments into smaller tasks, and give the student more time to complete work.

In other cases, the staff look at ways to provide more intensive instruction through daytime "pull-out" support and after-school programs. Much of the time, though, teachers use a combination of in-class and out-of-class strategies to address barriers to learning. As a first-grade teacher explained, they "pool a lot of resources" to help struggling students succeed.

When deciding which interventions to use with a student, the principal, teachers, and support staff at Peck draw on what they know about the student—not just academically but also personally—to select the ideal approach. Last year, for example, the reading program facilitator noticed a second-grade student who scored very low on the initial reading assessment. Principal Goodwin related:

> The SFA facilitator came to me and said, "Ms. Goodwin, this child needs for us to start tutoring immediately." And I said, "Okay. What are the needs? Who do you think is the best person to work with this child?" She said, "This person is real committed. She's going to have that soft-spoken kind of nurturing personality that's needed to sit there with this child and pump her up and keep her going."

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In a similar fashion, a first-grade teacher used what she knew about a student's academic needs and personality to help her succeed in the classroom. The student, "Karen,"[70] entered Peck in first grade, unable to do many of the things that she would have learned had she attended kindergarten. She could not spell her name or even recognize letters in the alphabet. Karen was immediately placed with the school's classroom size-reduction teacher, where she would receive intensive reading support in a small-group setting. The classroom size-reduction teacher explained:

> **The students get a better opportunity to interact with the teacher in the smaller setting. [We] take our time and "stretch" words that they might have difficulty with, review letter-sound association [and] comprehension skills, [and] predict what the story is going to be about—re-telling the story in your own words, and putting yourself into the story.**

Thus, Karen received three doses of reading each day—one through the school's morning reading program, one through the classroom size-reduction teacher, and one through her homeroom teacher. In her homeroom, the teacher worked to strengthen Karen's self-esteem through positive reinforcement and built on Karen's willingness to learn from her peers by providing her with lots of peer tutoring. Through these many interventions, her classroom teacher related, Karen's performance improved greatly.

Peck has several personnel and programs available to assist students who are falling behind in class. During the day, for example, students who are having the most difficulty in reading can receive 20 minutes of tutoring from one of five trained staff people. A second-grade teacher noted that she has "seen great results" with the tutoring program, but that it does take some coordination to make sure that students don't miss critical classroom instruction. The school also offers Extended Day classes three days a week throughout the year, and special Saturday tutorials on TAAS objectives just before the exam. These two optional programs provide students with additional small-group instruction on specific skills and objectives.

In addition to these special programs, several support personnel are available to help students who are struggling in class:

- *A mathematics facilitator and instructional technology specialist* who helps teachers with instructional strategies, team teaches, tutors, and runs the computer lab. The lab includes instructional software programs correlated with the state curriculum standards and other resources that can be tailored to the individual needs of students.
- *A Title I coordinator* who sees anyone from a fifth grader who needs help with problem- solving to a prekindergarten student who needs help with early literacy skills. The results of standardized tests, such as the Texas Primary Reading Inventory and the practice TAAS, are used to identify students who need her support.
- *A classroom size–reduction teacher* (or reading intervention specialist) who works with first- through third-grade students who need help in reading. Students are identified based on need as seen through their kindergarten Texas Primary Reading Inventory scores, practice TAAS exams, and TAAS performance. She sees students for 45 minutes to an hour in one-on-one or small-group settings.

The principal and teachers work together to decide which of these programs and services would most benefit each student. They also monitor student progress so that the amount of time a student spends in daytime pull-out and after-school programs varies according to the student's educational needs.

Reinforcing classroom learning at home

When discussing how they help students who are behind in class, the teachers at Peck invariably talk about their work with parents or with the student's primary caregiver. For quite a few of the students at Peck, this caregiver is a grandparent. The teachers call parents to discuss problems that they are seeing in the classroom and to encourage parents to let them know when they notice behavioral or learning problems at home. They also try to provide parents with materials and strategies that they can use to reinforce learning at home. This support, they say, is very helpful to students. One third-grade teacher related:

> **The parent noticed through the homework that I was sending home that [her daughter] was really having a hard time. . . . I told her, "Give her money. Give her your change and give her dollar bills and let her count it out to you. Every now and then call her in. Give her some coins and say *Count this for me*." . . . The parent returned this morning, as a matter of fact, and she told me, "I've been working with her and counting money and she's doing a much better job."**

The principal and teachers at Peck have made a conscious effort to involve parents in their children's education, even before problems arise in the classroom. At the beginning of the year, teachers call

[70] "Karen" is a pseudonym used for purposes of reading clarity.

parents to introduce themselves and to let them know how to get in touch. As one teacher clarified,

> **The first week of school, I call all of my parents and I talk to them, introduce myself, let them know that whatever they might need, to call me. I gave them my number at home and it was, "Oooh, you give your number at home?" They're not going to call me after midnight, so that's fine. . . . I've had parents call and say, "My son has to do this assignment. I didn't understand it. Could you help me?" . . . So we have that good rapport.**

In addition to the efforts of individual teachers, the staff at Peck have put in place several systems that support parental involvement. As part of the reading program, for example, they ask parents to read with their children for 20 minutes each evening and to document this time. In addition, the Communities in Schools project manager works with parents on attendance issues, and the school sponsors a Family Support Team, where teachers and families can go with problems related to a student's learning or behavior. The goal of the team is to let parents know what the school is doing to solve the problem and to engage the support of parents at home. That way, there will be consistency between what happens at school and what happens at home. The team also tries to help identify and resolve situations at home that might be affecting the child's performance at school.

Perhaps as a result of these efforts, several teachers talked about the positive support that they receive from parents and caregivers. Similarly, caregivers talk about the time they spend with their children each evening on homework, about specific areas where their children experience difficulty, and about how they feel comfortable contacting teachers and administrators at the school. That said, such parental support is not universal at Peck. Teachers admit that some parents aren't willing to work with their children at home and that some kids really suffer from pressures at home. In these cases, the staff at Peck redouble their efforts and do what they can to support the children at school.

Remaining flexible in addressing student needs

The staff at Peck are flexible in their approach to addressing student needs. The principal and teachers understand that new issues will come up during the course of the year, and they are willing to make the fiscal and staffing changes necessary to help students learn.

Every year, the principal explained, she and her teachers start off with a plan; and every year, something doesn't work. This year, it was the third-grade class. The classroom teacher and the support personnel worked with the students but it was clear that they weren't making progress. "Well, this is not solving the problem, so I'm going to have to do something different," the principal told herself. She examined the school's budget and decided that it was going to be necessary to give something up in order to provide intensified instruction to those students. She decided to use part of her Title I monies to hire another third-grade teacher, so that one teacher would have eight students and the other would have eleven. Together, she and the teachers decided which students would work best as a group.

Even with fewer students, the third-grade teachers had to bring a lot of resources, creativity, and energy to bear on the problems that their students were experiencing in class. They provided one-on-one tutoring and tutoring with other teachers, but for one of the third-grade teachers, "it still wasn't working." The students in her class were improving but it didn't show much in their grades. Moreover, each time the students received another failing grade, their self-esteem got lower.

Like the principal, the teacher felt that a change was needed. She started administering short tests of 17 to 20 questions correlated to the state curriculum standards. Instead of grading the tests as soon as students were done, she looked the tests over and told students problems that they should work through again. After students finished a second time, the teacher graded the tests and none of them scored lower than an 88. As the teacher explained, "It was strictly a mental strategy to get them to say, *I can do it.*" As a result, the teacher saw a marked improvement in the students' self-esteem and in their academic performance.

The other third-grade teacher explained that the staff at Peck feel that they have done their best to ensure the success of the third-grade class:

> **I feel I gave my 100 percent to my students. I feel we all did. We monitored and did everything we could—all the tutorials, all the extra things, the boost. . . . I figure I did my best and my students did their best.**

Exhausting all of the options

When asked at what point they decide to refer a child for special education testing, several teachers at Peck all gave a similar response: *after exhausting all of the resources available to me.* The principal, other teachers, and now the school's new Intervention Assessment Team all convey this expectation to teachers and help them brainstorm additional modifications that might work.

The teachers related that they first try to discern if the problem that the student is experiencing is behavioral, academic, or both. Based on that

information, they then implement a series of interventions and instructional modifications to help the student learn. As discussed earlier, teachers look for ways to tailor their instruction to the needs of the student and work to engage the support of parents. They also seek out suggestions from the student's previous teachers and from teachers on their grade-level teams. A second-grade teacher described the modifications that she uses in classroom:

> I try to work at the level the child is working at to see [if that helps. I] make some modifications in the classroom by allowing extra time. If I'm allowing extra time and it's still not helping, okay let me shorten the assignment. If I shorten the assignment for that child and he still can't do two problems, then I say, "Okay, it's something else going on."

The principal also gets involved in trouble-shooting solutions. In the case of a kindergarten student who did not progress during the first six weeks, for example, Principal Goodwin suggested additional strategies that the teacher should try. She then spoke with the mother of the student to discuss what they were seeing at school and ended up switching the student to another classroom to see if a different teacher might help. The principal also spoke with the student to better understand the problems he was experiencing in class and worked to help the mother understand the nature of her son's learning difficulties. The school and the mother then jointly decided to see if the student qualified for speech therapy. Once that process is over, the principal noted, "we're going to continue to work with [the mother] and get [the student] the help that he needs."

In addition to these informal processes, an Intervention Assessment Team, formed in fall 1999, helps teachers identify additional strategies they can try in the classroom before referral for diagnostic testing. The ultimate goal of the team is to avoid inappropriate referrals. Members of the team include the principal, the special education teacher, and the district diagnostician. The team was formed at the request of the school district, which has implemented this process at all of its schools. According to the special education teacher, the team had met three times by the time of our spring 2000 visit to the school. Of the three cases they reviewed, two went on to receive referrals for diagnostic testing.

While there are times when a referral for special education testing should be expedited, Principal Goodwin related, it is not something that she takes lightly. She explained:

> I want to make sure that I get the best program for that child. This is my professional opinion, that it's very difficult, if it can be done, to correct mistakes with children. If we make a typographical error, it's easy to white it out, but if we make a mistake with an instructional program for a child, it's very difficult to go back and correct. You don't have that time. You've lost that time. We don't want any mistakes.

Identifying Students in Need of Special Education Services

After exhausting all of the options available through the school's regular education program, classroom teachers at Peck may initiate a referral for diagnostic testing. In accordance with state and federal guidelines, such referrals are made only with the parent or guardian's prior consent. According to the district diagnostician who works with Peck, the school refers very few students for diagnostic testing. "I think that the referral process here is the very last resort," he commented. Similarly, the school gets very few referrals based solely on behavior. According to the Title I coordinator, in cases where behavior has been involved, the behavior problem was triggered by a learning disability.

At the time of our visit in spring 2000, there were eight pending referrals for special education testing, not including referrals for speech only and early childhood education. The staff at Peck attribute the school's low rate of referrals to the number, quality, and types of interventions and modifications that they try prior to testing. As one first-grade teacher observed,

> Why a lot of kids aren't being referred is because we do a lot of intervention before we actually go through the referral process. So that has a lot to do with it. The modifications, you know. [You] just don't put them in special ed because they don't know their ABCs.

They also attributed the low number of referrals to the high level of collaboration and professionalism seen on campus. The speech therapist, who had recently joined the campus, noted,

> These teachers work very well together here. They do a tremendous amount of collaboration, not just within the same grade level but across all the grade levels. They are very easy to talk to, meaning you can go to them and say, "Tell me such-and-such about this child. What would work best with him?" They're just very helpful, open. [They do] a whole lot of after-school this, after-school that, Saturday this. . . . Not just two weeks before the test—it's like year-round. They just really, really work hard.

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Peck's referral team carefully evaluates each request for special education testing. The team includes the school's Title I teacher, who serves as chair, the district diagnostician, the teacher making the referral, and any other teacher who knows the student's work. The principal provides suggestions but is not actually a member of the team. According to the two permanent members of the team, teacher referrals do not automatically lead to assessment. As the diagnostician explained,

> They bring the information to the table and then we discuss. . . . You can either kill it there or decide whether you're going to go ahead and do the testing. In killing it, you give them recommendations of other things that they should try before they actually refer a kid to go through the complete process.

The diagnostician and team chair look at the student's academic progress to see if the student has been retained or received multiple consecutive failures. They also look to see what interventions the teacher has tried and whether or not they have been successful. Specifically, they look to see if ability-grouping has been used to address the student's specific learning needs and whether the student has received extended time for assignment completion, shortened assignments, tutoring, peer tutoring, Extended Day services, and/or help from one of the school's support personnel. According to the team chair, "Teachers are also asked to look at their room environment to see if it is conducive for all learning styles and to take that into consideration when making interventions." When the team feels like the teacher has exhausted all appropriate interventions and the student still isn't succeeding, they usually approve testing.

Since the school has a number of students whose dominant language is Spanish, the district trained one of the school's bilingual aides to help with Spanish portions of the test. This year, the district also hired a bilingual diagnostician to handle testing in Spanish.

One person who facilitates the work of Peck's referral team is the Communities in Schools (CIS) project manager. In cases with medical issues, for example, the CIS manager has helped expedite the process by soliciting the help of outside agencies who may have already seen the student. She also helps when it comes to ensuring the participation of parents. She provides transportation for parents who don't have a way to get to the school and will occasionally serve as a parent advocate in the special education admission process. This includes helping the school change any misconceptions that parents might have about special education. The CIS project manager tells parents that "special ed does not mean that there's something wrong with your child. . . . Children [just] learn differently."

Ensuring the Success of Students With Disabilities

The staff at Peck view special education as a tool for bringing students up to grade level—for addressing areas where students need improvement and helping students succeed in the regular education classroom. As a first-year classroom teacher related,

> I always thought, from my experience in school, that special ed was for children that really were slow learners, or not as bright as the others. But [my experience with a recent referral here at Peck] made me realize that's not necessarily what it is. You're just targeting those children that are not achieving in the classroom the way they should. The whole point is to get them to achieve, to get them to the point where they are able to do the work, maybe with modifications, . . . sometimes without modifications. That's all it's about.

Consistent with the school's overall approach to learning, numerous individuals collaborate to ensure the success of students with disabilities at Peck. Key among these are the regular education teachers, the special education teacher, and parents. As a former special education teacher at the school reflected, "Everyone is talking and sharing and giving information that's pertinent to what the child really needs to excel [in class]."

Range of Special Education Services

Due to the small number of students in need of special education at Peck, the range of services offered on campus is limited to those necessary to meet the needs of the students. The services provided on campus include speech therapy and resource support.

A district speech therapy specialist provides services on campus two times per week. At the time of our visit, six students received speech services.

In resource support, a special education teacher and one aide work with students on specific areas where they need improvement, with the goal of bringing them up to grade level. As the special education teacher emphasized,

> Just because the child becomes a resource student doesn't mean that he's going to continue to be in resource his whole career in school. It only means that we're addressing that problem, and it's our job to bring him up.

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At the time of our visit, eleven students received support in the resource classroom. Like the demographics of the school, three-fourths of these students were African American and one-fourth were Latino. One student had limited proficiency in English and was served by a bilingual aide under the supervision of the special education teacher. A bilingual regular education teacher also provided some extra services to this student. All but a couple of students were referred into special education by the staff at Peck. The others were referred by another school and then transferred to Peck.

Until 1999–2000, the school also offered a "generic" class for students who needed special education instruction in reading, mathematics, and language arts. A special education aide would supervise the student so that he or she could be included in activities with their class, such as physical education. This year, however, only one Peck student needed the school's generic services, so the district decided it would be better to serve the student at a nearby campus. The student in question was a fourth-grader, and his parents wanted him to stay at Peck. To accommodate their request, the school found ways to meet the student's academic needs on campus. They placed the student in a reading group that was working at his level and provided him with additional support through the resource classroom. The school made sure that he ate lunch with the fourth-grade class, was included in the school's awards programs (for attendance, computers, etc.), and was provided opportunities to serve as the leader of students who were functioning at the same grade level. According to the principal, the arrangement worked well and staff at the school have begun to see a "spark" of excitement about learning in the student.

Special education services for students with limited proficiency in English

The bilingual education teachers and the special education teacher collaborate most directly in serving students with disabilities and limited proficiency in English. Along with a representative of the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC)[71] these teachers participate in the ARD committee meetings and in developing and monitoring the individual education program (IEP) for each student. The LPAC at least annually reviews each student's progress while the student is in the bilingual program and after the student is dismissed from the program.

In addition, the district requires that all students in special education be closely monitored, and a report sent to parents every four-and-a-half months. If, when these reports are developed, a student is failing, a "failure review ARD" must be held to develop plans to quickly intervene and provide additional support to meet the goals of the IEP. This means that two committees assist the teachers in monitoring progress so that struggling students who participate in both programs can be provided additional support quickly.

Unless a student with limited proficiency in English requires the more intensive "generic" services provided at another campus, the student will spend most of the day in the bilingual classroom, with additional support provided by the special education teacher and a bilingual special education aide.

Helping Students Be Successful in Class

The regular education teachers expect that students who receive special education services can be successful in class if provided with instruction that meets their individual needs. They hold the students to high expectations and use a variety of teaching strategies to help students learn. Reflecting on one of her students who receives services in the resource classroom, a third-grade teacher noted,

> She's going to be an 'A' student when it's all over. She's very, very, very knowledgeable. She's easy to teach. It was just a matter of figuring out which teaching method worked for her. She's one of these people [who] needs it bit by bit. She's a sequential learner. As long as you do it the way that she's going to comprehend . . . she'll probably do better than some of the others.

In addition to modifying instruction to meet the needs of students, the teachers at Peck look for ways to recognize students' strengths and work to ensure that students are integral members of the class. As a fourth-grade teacher related, "They'll go to resource for whatever they go for, but when they're in class, they are part of us and we don't separate them."

In fact, the staff at Peck are proud of the degree to which students who receive special education services are integrated into the school's regular education program. Students with disabilities participate in the school's 90-minute reading program, where they are grouped with students at the same functional reading

[71] The Texas Education Code requires each school district to establish a Language Proficiency Assessment Committee composed of a professional bilingual educator, a transitional language educator, a parent of a student with limited proficiency in English, and a campus administrator. The committee must recommend the most appropriate placement and monitor the progress of students with limited proficiency in English.

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level. Moreover, they participate in the same daytime pull-out programs and after-school tutoring sessions as any student on campus, including small-group instruction with the reading and instructional technology specialists, Extended Day school, summer school, and the Saturday TAAS tutorials.

As with students on campus, the progress of students in the special education program is closely monitored and data is used to guide services and instruction. *All* students, for example, participate in the eight-week assessments in reading, in the TAAS benchmark tests, and—unless their disability is severe—in the Stanford 9 exam. Teachers and administrators use the eight-week assessments to determine whether or not the student is ready to move to another reading level. They use the benchmark tests to determine if the student needs additional help on specific objectives; and they use the Stanford 9 to look at the student's progress over the course of the year. Where special education students often differ from their peers is in TAAS participation. Some students are exempt from taking the TAAS in the subject areas where they receive special education services. In these instances, one of several alternative exams is administered, including TEAMS, Brigance, the Primary Progress Check List, or a TAAS release test.

In the resource classroom, the special education teacher works on the areas where students need the most help, as specified in their individual education programs (IEPs). The district special education coordinator for Peck visits the school on a weekly basis to observe the resource classroom and ensure that the student's IEP is being met through the teacher's weekly lesson plans. Although much of his work focuses on what staff at the campus commonly refer to as "deficits," the special education teacher likes to use his time with students to also challenge them to higher thinking. He explained:

> Even if you're dealing with a set of objectives that you need to work on, you've always got to move the child ahead. I like to challenge children. Once I think they've met a certain objective then I'll move on to a higher level of thinking.

Several of the regular education teachers spoke with respect about the work of the special education teacher. One teacher even talked about how she asks students to share with others the strategies that they learned in the resource classroom. In a similar fashion, the special education teacher credits the success of his students to the collaboration of classroom teachers and caregivers or parents.

The three caregivers interviewed—a great-grandparent, a non-familial guardian, and a mother—were all very involved in their children's education. They worked with their children each evening on class work and tried to address at home areas where their children were experiencing the most difficulty in class. In these efforts, they felt supported by the staff at Peck. According to the guardian of one student in special education,

> [The resource teacher] has really been wonderful with helping me. . . . He gave me extra books for him to read, and whatever I ask of him, he's been there. Even when I called the principal, . . . they didn't shoo me off. They listened to what I had to say. That means a lot, when you listen to what a parent has to say.

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Report Conclusion

The five schools in this study show that it is possible to meet and even surpass high standards while including students with disabilities in state assessments and in the state accountability system. They demonstrate forcefully that students with disabilities can be held to challenging academic standards. Despite their success, these five schools continue to work to improve student achievement and to ensure that students with disabilities are included in all activities. One parent of a student at Ogg, in describing how the school continued to improve, explained, ". . . they're always learning. . . . They're always looking for a better way."

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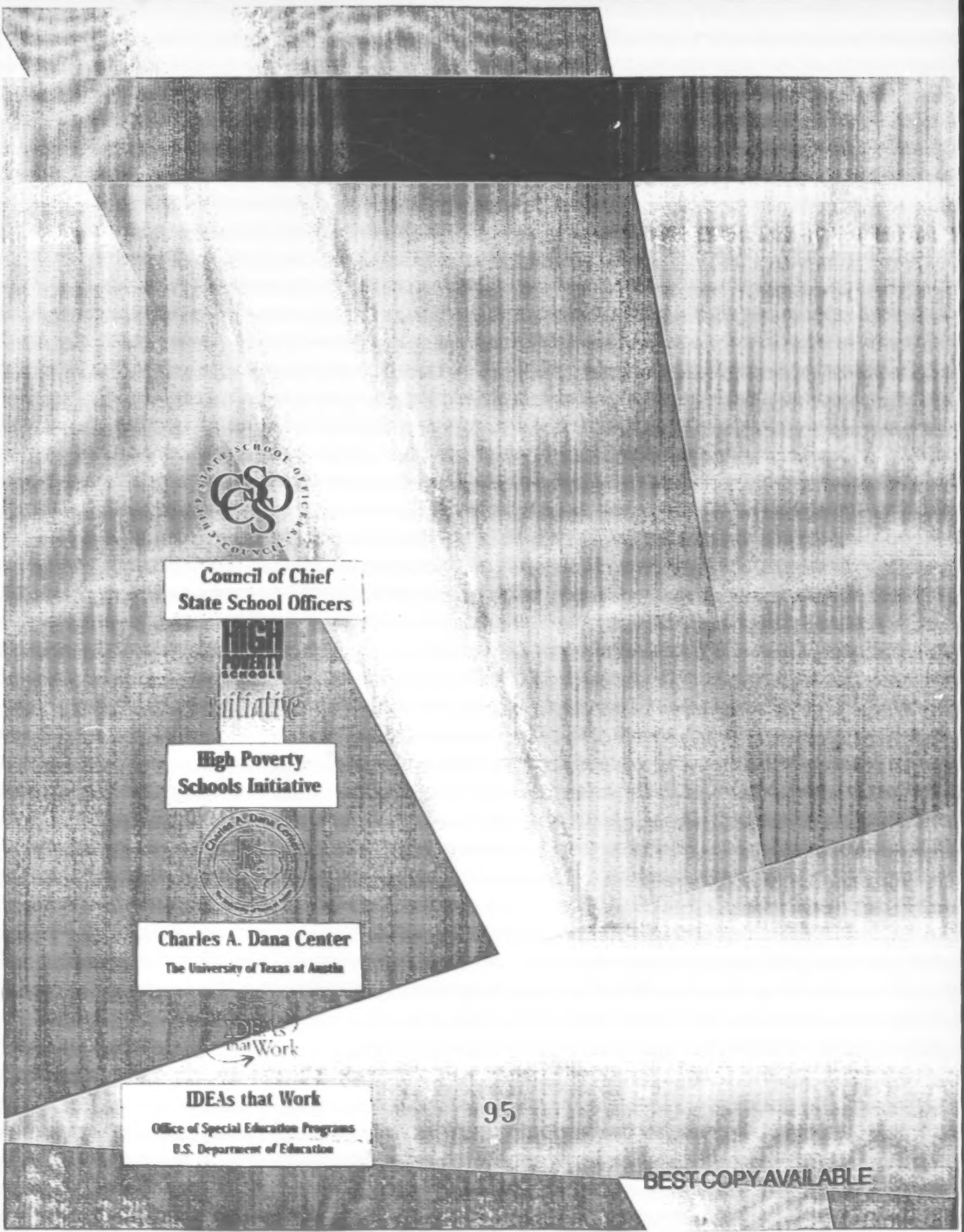

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